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# KZF to move headquarters to redone downtown space

Business Courier of Cincinnati - by [Laura Baverman](#) Staff Reporter

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**KZF Design** will spend \$6 million renovating an early 20th century downtown building into a headquarters 40 percent larger than its existing Walnut Hills space.

The architecture firm has purchased 700 Broadway, the longtime headquarters of **ST Media Group**, for \$1.14 million, according to the Hamilton County Auditor. Renovations will be complete next summer.

ST moved to Sycamore Township earlier this year.

"KZF Design is intending for the . . . building to be a showplace in LEED Silver, workplace design," said CEO Bill Wilson in an e-mail. The firm has operated out of the Grand Baldwin building since 1987.

While many architecture firms have faltered in recent months, KZF has managed to grow. Its 2009 backlog of work is \$3 million higher than 2008, said Natascha Grody, director of the firm's branding division. KZF added 15 new employees in 2008 and borrowed several workers from other local firms. It employs more than 100.

Company executives attribute the firm's expansion to its focus on the government and justice sectors and workplace design. It operates in eight markets, with offices in Cincinnati, Atlanta, and Tampa and Orlando, Fla.

"Whenever you are that diversified, you are safe from most of the economic mishaps that can happen to a firm," Grody said.

KZF also created a branding division called Studio 8 in June. In October, it formed a joint venture with a Florida civil engineering and surveying firm to provide services to the central part of that state.

**Scripps Networks Interactive** recently awarded KZF a contract to redesign and rebrand its Cincinnati and Knoxville, Tenn., offices.

The firm also will do the interior design work for **Great American Insurance** when it



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moves to Queen City Square in 2011.

“The strength right now is in previously committed funds,” said John Rademacher, a principal with **SFA Architects** and president of the local chapter of the **American Institute of Architects** (AIA). “Most of that is in government or government-sponsored state work.”

Until September, institutional work had been the only sector still growing. AIA’s September Architectural Billings Index, an economic indicator, showed a decline in that work for the first time in years. Still, it’s the most stable, Rademacher said.

The 40,000-square-foot former ST Media building at the intersection of Eighth and Broadway is best recognized for the billboard attached to its north side where radio personality Dennis “Wildman” Walker camped out for 61 days in 1991 awaiting a **Cincinnati Bengals** win. Executives of ST Media Group have owned the facility since it was built, but chose to sell.

“It’s nice to see someone revitalizing a building and not tearing it down,” said Doug Altemuehle, the **Grubb & Ellis/West Shell Commercial** broker who sold the facility. He entertained four offers for the space. Two would have imploded it and rebuilt on the site. KZF chose the building due to its accessibility, highway visibility and parking.

The larger facility will allow the firm to continue to add staff. It also may lease space to a tenant with a practice that complements the firm’s, Grody said.

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