



In Prince William County, Va., which is 25 miles southwest of Washington, D.C., a growing town called Bristow has welcomed a new self-storage facility. CubeSmart, *Mini-Storage Messenger's* Facility of the Year winner of the new facility category, is anything but square. This modern storage property is turning heads and impressing industry professionals with its unique, eye-catching design. In fact, Heath Mulkey, owner of Villa Rica, Ga.-based Storage Structures, the company that erected the facility's metal structures and metal roofing, calls the facility "very striking" and adds that its appearance is "ahead of the visual curve." From the site's location, demographics, and aesthetics to its high-quality finishes and special touches, CubeSmart has clearly made its mark in Northern Virginia as well as the self-storage industry.

A Stellar Site

At a quick glance, Bristow, Va., wouldn't seem like the optimal location for a new state-of-the-art self-storage facility, but the old saying "don't judge a book by its cover" certainly applies. Bristow is located along the Potomac River within Prince William County, one of the fastest growing counties in the United States and one of the highest income counties in the country with the average annual household income at \$100,000. Moreover, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Bristow increased by 89 percent over a nine-year period from 2000 to 2009.

The area surrounding the CubeSmart facility is experiencing substantial growth as well. A nearby planned community includes approximately 300 new homes currently under

development and new schools in the general vicinity. The property is within a mile of two large shopping centers and another major convenience store is scheduled to open soon next to the facility. In addition, across the street, a medical office, hospital complex, and pharmacy are in the process of being built.

And as if all this hustle and bustle around the facility wasn't enough to attract tenants, CubeSmart is also in close proximity to Route 28, a high-traffic highway that connects Dulles International Airport throughout Northern Virginia. Traffic counts during the time of development exceeded 40,000 cars per day and rush-hour traffic comes to a halt directly in front of CubeSmart's lot. "It's cool how visible it is," says Mulkey. "It is very striking as you're coming down the road."

A Handful Of Hurdles

There are bound to be some challenges with any construction project and CubeSmart had its share. In order to lessen the headaches of the entitlement process, the owners and developers searched for a "by-right" site for its intended use. The plot they found was a perfect fit since it allowed storage development and had an excellent retail presence. "Cutting through the red tape was the biggest hurdle of the project," says Noah Mehrkam, the facility's owner. "There are always challenges. We had our share with this facility, but we moved through them."

Just when the team thought all the pieces were in place to obtain the necessary building permits for the job, the county's transportation department threw a monkey wrench in their plan. Mehrkam says the transportation department had plans to make road improvements that consisted of adding a bike lane and

turning lane to the road in front of the site. Those plans also included a drainage ditch that interfered with the facility's planned entrance. After many meetings and discussions, the facility's engineers were able to convince the transportation department to adjust its plans to move the location of the drainage ditch. With CubeSmart's original plans unaltered, the team broke ground and proceeded until they reached the next hurdle.

While Mehrkam was set on utilizing natural gas at the property, it wasn't a simple request. That particular parcel of land was not serviced by the gas company. After making several requests to the utility company, he had to take matters into his own hands. "It was a battle," he says. "We actually started a neighborhood petition to get the gas utility to extend service to our site and the neighboring sites." But the gas company wasn't the only utility to cause problems. There was a code requirement in place that stipulated that the developers needed to move the existing overhead utility

lines. It took the owners and developer months to resolve this issue because they had to coordinate the relocation of the lines with three utility providers—one of those being Verizon, which serviced 15,000 nearby households.

Another major issue came from above and below in the form of water. The facility, which took 11 months to complete, was mainly constructed during the winter and spring. Therefore, a long, harsh winter and wet spring caused a fair share of delays. CubeSmart also happens to be built on top of several underground springs. Dealing with the natural springs required some creative design solutions in order to make the project work as some of those springs were within the footprint of one of the facility's buildings. It required plenty of coordination between the construction team, architect, and engineers (civil, soil, and structural) to come up with a viable answer. A large, above-ground storm water basin with a filtration system was constructed to prevent unfiltered storm water from reaching

the Chesapeake Bay. In order to reduce costs and minimize the impact, the team worked with the neighboring site to create one regional basin that works for both lots instead of each site having its own smaller basin. In addition, underground channels were made to redirect water from the natural springs to the storm water system. "We created a drainage to the storm water basin to capture the water below the surface," says Mehrkam. "It was a low-impact design solution."

Top-Notch Design

Despite the tribulations, the end result is a stunning self-storage facility with 90,000 rentable square feet of storage space and 880 units. Perhaps the most impressive element is the way the buildings complement the existing grading of the site. "It's a very efficient design and use of the site," Mulkey says. "It isn't a large parcel, but they made very good use of the land."

The buildings are built into a hill and were designed to take advantage of 100 percent at-grade access. Due to the stepped nature of the buildings, no elevators were required and all units are easily accessible. "We are very proud of being able to deliver a next-generation facility with a high-quality design that meets consumer needs while providing 100 percent first-floor access to our customers," says Mehrkam.

The exterior of the facility has a clean, high-quality finish with ground and split-faced block to create areas of horizontal striping. "It has a unique look," says Mulkey. "The facade looks retail oriented." The unique look that Mulkey mentions was accomplished in part by the color selections for the metal panels. "Some of the panels were unpainted," he says. "They were silver, just pure metal, painted with acrylic." Variations to the facade were created by using a combination of insulated metal panels and corrugated metal siding. With a high R-value of R-30, the insulated metal panels produce energy savings for the facility as well.

Of course the office area is very aesthetically pleasing and inviting, too. The layout has a good flow to enable the manager to interact immediately with customers. It features a customer lounge

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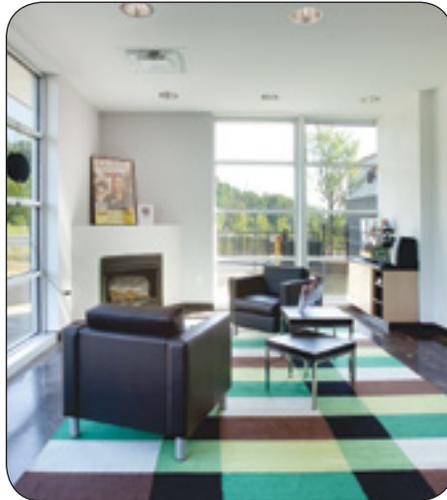
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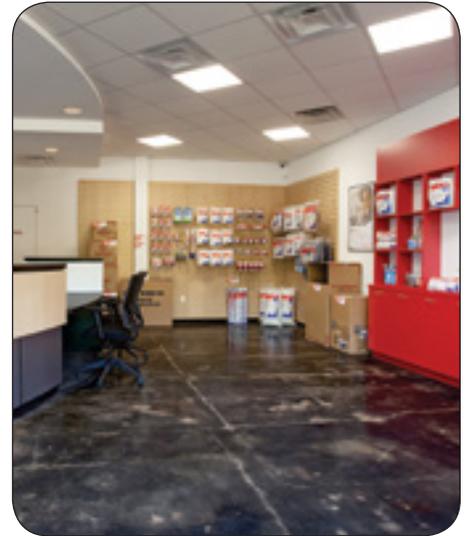
complete with a cozy gas fireplace and flat screen TV. Customers can also enjoy the comfortable seating area, free Wi-Fi, and coffee bar while visiting the property. The industrial yet warm finishes include buffed concrete floors with a dark stain, built-in CubeSmart-red cabinets, and display cubes. There are merchandise displays as well.

To create an open, spacious look, the two-story office has exposed steel beams and large storefront glass. The saw-tooth section by the office that has the storefront glass was done to display an exposed corridor of red roll-up doors. This soffit makes the doors visible to passers-by on Route 28. The second floor of the office contains six office spaces that are available for lease and a conference room. "We had an extra floor above the office," Mehrkam says. "We decided to turn it into office spaces that we could rent out with flexible terms instead of a manager's apartment. It turned out to be a good decision since there is a need for office space among



small business owners and entrepreneurs in the area."

Throughout the facility, white flush panels with red door numbers from Janus International line the halls. Inside the various sized roll-up doors and swing doors from Janus were gloss white in color, while the exterior doors and those visible from the outside were patriot red to match CubeSmart's branding. In total, the facility



utilized 288 swing doors and 650 roll-up doors in seven different sizes. Janus also provided the diamond plate corner guards, kick plates, and wains cot that were used in high-traffic areas throughout the buildings. To top things off, all of the interior storage units are climate controlled, all of the hallway lights are motion activated, and the sliding glass doors at

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the entrance are on sensors to provide customer's with hands-free access.

Last but not least, ample signage was used to ensure that the CubeSmart brand was clearly visible. Thanks to the dimensions of the site, code allowed for a large signage square footage allocation.

Bells And Whistles

CubeSmart isn't without its fair share of bells and whistles. It has a comprehensive security system provided by PTI Security Systems of Scottsdale, Ariz. Throughout the property, there are 11 keypads in various locations, including the entry gate and the sliding glass doors to the office, to control access to the facility. High-tech cameras a DVRs are strategically placed around the site, while numerous intercom substations provide customers with a fast connection to the office staff. Those same intercoms play background music throughout the buildings when they aren't in use.

To make renting at CubeSmart easier for both customers and staff alike, the facility relies on management software by CenterShift, which was recently acquired by Yardi. This web-based software is fully integrated with CubeSmart's suite of services such as its call center, website, and accounting software. "CubeSmart does things with our software that others don't do," says James Hafen, Yardi's general manager - industry principal for self-storage. "We are like an 'enabler' as our software enables them to store and access data. It helps the facility run and operate." He adds that while CubeSmart uses a sophisticated and unique accounting program, CenterShift provides only the accounts receivable end of it.

And this CubeSmart facility, like other CubeSmart facilities, offers a sweet suite of customer services that range from the typical to the unique. Similar to many storage properties, it provides moving trucks, moving assistance, and packing/moving supplies for purchase. In addition, CubeSmart offers shredding services, package acceptance, shipping services, office amenities, and organizational services to name a few.

Behind The Scenes

A great self-storage facility also needs

to have a stellar management team and, according to Mehrkam, his does. "We are most proud of our management team at CubeSmart," he says. "Not only do we have wonderful store managers who have thus far led a very successful lease up, but the back-office team was instrumental in aiding the owners in creating the right unit mix for the market early in the process." Mehrkam adds, "The operations team remained unflappable in the hectic weeks leading up to the store opening, in that transition where a construction site becomes a retail business."

The numbers speak volumes in regards to its success. CubeSmart's tenant mix is 85 percent residential customers and 15 percent commercial customers. With an average of more than 70 rentals per month, the management team was able to exceed 65 percent occupancy within the first year. However, reaching those numbers wouldn't have been possible without the persistent marketing and advertising methods employed by CubeSmart's dedicated staff.

Reaching The Community

Although delays caused the facility's grand opening to be rescheduled multiple times, the management team was able to turn those busts into boons. Perhaps blessings in disguise, the delays gave the team more time to improve their marketing materials and even obtain several reservations prior to opening. Some of the marketing methods they employed included referrals, signage, and print advertising. They put up both temporary and permanent signage to garner attention. The temporary "self-storage coming soon" signs stated the facility's website address and the toll-free number to CubeSmart's call center. A rental truck with CubeSmart graphics is used as mobile signage as well as an additional perk for new customers. They placed an advertisement in a local real estate brochure. The management team also spent numerous hours visiting businesses in the area to introduce themselves and establish referral partnerships. Part of their business-to-business outreach efforts included marketing literature. The brochures and fliers that they distributed highlighted special discounts and promotions such as a free month's rent when

you refer a friend and \$25 gift cards for business referrals. And with 89 rentals in the first month alone, it's safe to say their efforts were well worth the time and energy.

In addition to these marketing efforts, CubeSmart chose to solidify its commitment to its community by contributing to a charitable cause. Last year the facility and CubeSmart participated in a non-profit charity run that was hosted by one of the owner's large investors. This particular annual charity run benefits a dozen non-profit organizations in the area and is attended by more than 3,000 runners. Together CubeSmart and the Bristow facility were able to become a silver sponsor of the 2013 event by donating \$5,000. In addition to the sponsorship, CubeSmart donated a raffle prize of six months free storage, handed out free storage coupons, and distributed hundreds of branded bottles of water to participating runners. The facility and CubeSmart decided to sponsor the event again in 2014 with a \$7,000 donation. 

Erica Shatzer is a freelance editor and writer based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania.

QUICK FACTS

Facility Owner: Noah Mehrkam, Bristow Self Storage, LLC

General Contractor: NCB Construction, Inc

Architect: Sam Butz, Butz Wilbern Architects

Roof: Storage Structures

Doors & Hallway Systems: Janus International

Vertical Lift Gate AutoGate, Inc.

Security System: Ultimate Access Solutions

Keypads: PTI Security Systems

Management Software: CenterShift