

Mini-Storage **Messenger**

DECEMBER 2008

\$7.95

THE ORIGINAL VOICE OF THE SELF STORAGE INDUSTRY

2008

FACILITY OF THE YEAR

Conversion Winner

838-1500

(323) 838-1500

MAGELLAN STORAGE

CITY OF COMMERCE, CALIFORNIA

2008 FACILITY OF THE YEAR

CONVERSION WINNER

Magellan Storage

City of Commerce, California • Photos courtesy of Magellan Storage



By Elizabeth Ferrin

Almost 600 years ago, Ferdinand Magellan led the first successful expedition around the world. Along the way, the explorer and his crew discovered new lands, documented previously unknown animals, and opened up uncharted waterways to the western world. These voyagers fought wars, survived raging storms, and triumphed over hunger and theft. With Magellan at the helm, the explorers effectively mapped out the way for others to follow in their footsteps.

Today, one company has adopted both the name and spirit of this explorer and is setting the pace for success in the self-storage industry. Working to be the best in the industry, Magellan Storage is dedicated to providing excellent service and meeting the unique needs of all its customers. This business philosophy served as the driving force behind one of the company's newest self-storage projects.

The *Mini-Storage Messenger* magazine is proud to name this innovative site the 2008 Facility of the Year Winner in the conversion category—Magellan Storage in the City of Commerce, Calif.



FACTS AT A GLANCE

Owner/Developer

The Magellan Group, Inc.

Construction Company

Al Shankle Construction

Construction Manager

Furuto Rubio & Associates

Architect

Jordan Architects, Inc.

Accounting System

Centershift

Security System

Digitech International

Doors

U.S. Door & Building Components;
White Hawke

Interior Systems

White Hawke

Exploring New Territories

Like true explorers, Magellan Storage wanted to find a new territory. The company set out and went looking for an area with few self-storage options. "We did some research and found that the City of Commerce was under served for self-storage," says Kevin Staley, owner/developer of Magellan Storage. "We also felt that the Magellan Storage brand would be well received in this local market."

While the developers were busy trying to pinpoint underserved areas in terms of storage, one of the commercial buildings already held in the company's portfolio became vacant. The site originally served as a food distribution building, but it was situated in a prime, high traffic count, highly visible area. Although the existing building itself was not especially well suited for storage, the company knew the site was perfect for a self-storage business.

Magellan Storage decided to take a closer look at their vacant warehouse to see if there was some way the building could be converted into a state-of-the-art self-storage facility. "The existing building was a 40- to 50-

year -old dock high concrete tilt-up," says David E. Sapper, division manager of the Mira Loma, Calif.-based Al Shankle Construction Co. "It had been a grocery distribution warehouse."

Battle For Zoning

Although the location of the building was ideal, the property struggled with several issues that had to be addressed before beginning the conversion process. One of the biggest challenges involved securing the proper zoning to allow for a self-storage business. "When we originally met with the city, self-storage wasn't allowed," says Bruce Jordan, NCARB, president of Jordan Architects, Inc., in San Clemente, Calif. Armed with renderings that showcased the type of finished project Magellan Storage wanted to build, the company set out to convince the zoning board that the storage facility would benefit the community. "The city knew there was a need and we gave them documentation to show that need. It took a lot of effort and convincing. We had numerous meetings with the city that occurred over a one-year period."

While debating with the city, the building remained idle throughout the wait for officials to green light the conversion project. Although the property was unused during this time period, it was not empty. "The building was vacant while we were getting the permits," says Kari Kaltenborn, director of operations for Magellan Storage. "But, people moved in. They actually set up a pretty solid camp there."

She goes on to explain that several vagrants had made a home in the building while the company was busy challenging the site's status. Once the zoning situation was finalized, the squatters had to be removed in order to start the conversion process. Since intruders had been a problem, Magellan Storage decided to hire nighttime security guards to protect the site throughout all phases of construction. The guards were able to remove the squatters and prevent others from seeking shelter inside the building.

Even after the people were removed, the building was not completely vacant. "A group of stray cats also took up residence there," says Kaltenborn. "A previous

tenant had brought in a cat to catch rats. When the tenant moved out, he left the cats behind."

The cats had multiplied and were living throughout the building. A woman living in the neighborhood had befriended the animals and fed them every night. Rather than exterminating the cats, Magellan Storage found the woman who then offered to adopt the animals.

Fighting Vandalism

Now that the company finally had an empty building, the focus turned from the inside to the outside of the building. Specifically, there was a growing concern about protecting the property from vandalism. "We were a little nervous about graffiti and vandalism," says Kaltenborn. She quickly added that the building included rows of long white walls which would be very vulnerable to graffiti.

To protect their investment, the company wanted to dial down the graffiti temptation as much as possible. "Magellan was very concerned with limiting the graffiti after completion," says Sapper. With that in mind, Magellan Storage strategically placed cameras to record all activity on the building's exterior. They also made room for additional plantings in the site's landscaping plan. "The landscape was changed to include plants that made it very difficult to get close to the building."

After minimizing the vandalism risk, Magellan Storage turned its attention to the site's physical challenges. One of the biggest issues involved the floor of the main building. "This was a fairly typical food distribution warehouse with what we call a 'dock high' floor," says Jordan. "The floor was three feet, six inches above the grading of the site, so big rigs can easily back up and unload. It's great for food distribution, but horrible for self-storage."

The solution to this dilemma involved bringing in multiple truckloads of dirt to help level the site. The dirt was strategically placed around the property and built up to slope toward the building. This configuration made it easy for customers to access units on the ground level of the storage facility.



Changes And Updates

Since the site is located in California, earthquakes were a concern for the developers. "The existing building had to be brought up to current seismic codes, which presented many challenges requiring on-site decisions," says Sapper. "The design team worked great together in resolving these issues in a timely manner."

Along with earthquake provisions, the city wanted the facility to expand the existing sidewalks on the property. At this point, the permits were already in place and construction was underway. While this request was not a zoning requirement, the company agreed to meet the city's demands and enlarged the concrete sidewalks by approximately five feet in width.

After completing the updates, Magellan Storage took a close-up look at the existing structure to determine what changes were necessary to successfully develop a self-storage facility. "The building was basically a big, open warehouse with columns," says Jordan. "We put a mezzanine

in the middle to change it from one story and doubled the square footage in the building. We also added new buildings to get the architectural look we were after."

Building New Structures

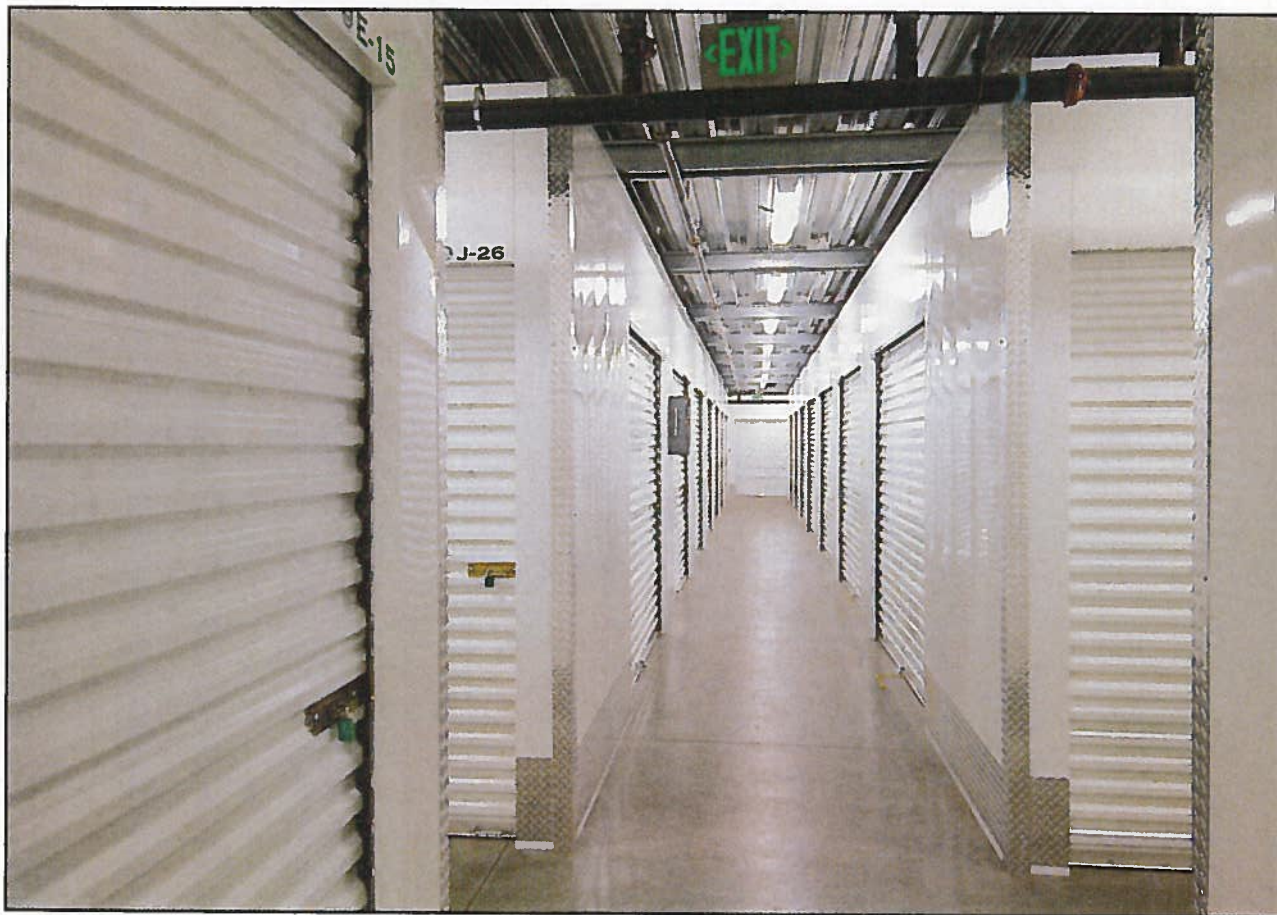
These five new outer buildings were placed along the property line near the street. They allowed for convenient drive-up storage, which the developers knew was in high demand in the area. Since vehicle storage was also needed, the developers included large, drive-up units that were big enough to hold cars and RVs. As a secondary benefit, the new buildings also screened the property's existing structure from passers-by, giving drivers and customers a more attractive focal point.

The project's defining architectural feature—a high-profile, raised corner—proudly showcased the Magellan Storage name, phone number, and insignia. "The way the building rises on the corner is designed to look like the bow of a ship," says Jordan. It keeps true to the overall

old-world, Magellan-inspired theme seen in all of Magellan Storage's facilities.

Since a second story was added to the original building, elevators needed to be included in the project to make the facility as user-friendly as possible. "One of the biggest things we look at with conversions is travel distance," says Jordan. "We had to place elevators so we could minimize these travel distances." With that in mind, the developers carefully examined the site plan and strategically added three elevators. The elevators dissected the structure into three distinct areas and made for easy access to all second-floor units.

As the construction process continued, more architectural details were added to the building's exterior. Bricks and green trim were included to keep in line with the old-world, maritime feel. "The exterior turned out really well," says Ryan Taylor, senior estimator and project manager for California-based White Hawke, Inc., providers of the



structural metal framing, studs, and partitions for the conversion. "We've done business with Magellan before and built quite a few of their projects; and this one turned out great."

Magellan-Inspired Office

As the exterior design took shape, the developers turned their attention to the project's interior features and amenities. They decided to focus much of their efforts on the sales office, in which materials were specifically selected to continue the old-world theme. Wooden desks, brick walls, and brass accents helped set the Magellan-inspired tone. Nautical, brass lighting fixtures were then strategically placed throughout the self-storage facility. As a final touch, an inlaid oversized compass design, a symbol of Magellan Storage, was also included and prominently displayed on the office's high-quality laminate floor.

To maximize space, fully functional model units were also included in the

office area. "We have sample units of our 10-by-20, 10-by-15, 5-by-10, and 5-by-5 sizes with roll-up doors inside our office," says Kaltenborn. "They all have carpet and drywall, but they give tenants a good idea of the sizing." Most of the model units are staged with boxes and moving supplies that customers can purchase and use in their own self-storage spaces. The remaining unit houses a kids' play area that is complete with toys and games.

The crown jewel of the office was the site graphics display showcasing several high-tech monitors. "The office has an array of plasma screens behind the counter," says Jordan. "Four of the monitors are tied to on-site cameras, while the bigger monitor is tied to the company's management software."

Emphasis On Security

Security was also in the forefront in planning the building's function and design. "Magellan is very big on the security part," says Jordan. "They have

a full-security system with individual door alarms and individual cameras that record for 30 days."

The buildings themselves also help secure the site by forming a barrier around the perimeter of the property. To enter and exit the area, the developers allowed for four gated access points. Customers going in and out can only enter the front or rear of the property at one given time. Along with secure access, proper indoor and outdoor lighting, as well as intercoms placed throughout the property, round out the self-storage facility's security features.

Comfort was another key consideration in the office's design. A small gathering area was included at the end of the customer service counter. This was included specifically for new customers who needed a nice, comfortable area where they could sit down, speak with the manager, and fill out paperwork.

All of these high-end features were included to help set Magellan Storage



apart from other self-storage businesses in the area and attract new customers to the facility. However, the owners were especially interested in targeting business renters, so they made an effort to include all of the amenities and features that would have special appeal to these customers. "We try to cater to business tenants, because they tend to be long-staying and pay on time," says Staley. "So, we offer free Internet, fax, phone, and use of an on-site conference room."

Once all the bricks were laid and the finishing touches were complete, Magellan Storage was ready to serve the people of the City of Commerce, Calif. In the spring of 2008, the self-storage facility opened for business with 137,200 rentable square feet and 1,360 storage units.

Bilingual Marketing Efforts

In terms of getting the word out to the community, Magellan Storage had to finalize the marketing plan several months before opening its doors for business. "We had to sign up for the *Yellow Pages* six months prior to opening," says Kaltenborn. Since many residents in the area primarily speak Spanish, the facility decided to offer both Spanish and English language versions of all their marketing materials.

"We signed up for both the English and Spanish *Yellow Pages*."

Surprisingly, the area did not offer some of the traditional marketing venues that many self-storage facilities rely on for advertising. "*The Penny Saver* and *ValPak* don't even cover this area," says Kaltenborn. "So, we do direct mailers and door hangers with a company we found through the Chamber of Commerce. We also do the local Spanish language newspapers."

Even without some of the traditional self-storage marketing stand-bys, Magellan Storage has been able to successfully spread its message across the community. In fact, the business saw an unexpectedly large turn out at the facility's grand opening celebration. "We had an In-N-Out Burger® truck come out for a celebration just after opening," says Kaltenborn. "That event drew more than 400 people."

Community Support

While events and mailers have helped increase the community's awareness of the self-storage facility, Magellan Storage says their customers themselves are their best, most effective marketing tool. "This is a very close knit community," says Kaltenborn. "Customer service is key, and it sets us apart from other

facilities. If our customers like us, they tell other people. It's especially great for us because it's free."

Local support for Magellan Storage has been phenomenal. "The community really likes it because it cleaned up the corner," says Jordan. "One of our biggest challenges was to go into an area with a lot of warehouses that's not very attractive and put in this kind of building. I think we designed a facility that's a handsome part of the community."

While the conversion project is now complete, the voyage for Magellan Storage in the City of Commerce will go on. Like the company's explorer namesake, the facility's journey has taken a few twists and turns, but its focus on the final goal never wavered. The business' quest to offer the best facilities, finest service, and the highest degree of customer satisfaction will definitely lead Magellan Storage to loyal customers, an appreciative community, and bottom line success. ■



Elizabeth Ferrin is the Editor of *Self-Storage Now!* Based in Maple Grove, Minnesota, she is also a frequent contributor to the *Mini-Storage Messenger*, *Mobile Self-Storage Magazine*, and *RV & Boat Storage Today*.