

## McConnell Johnson refits Hercules HQ for innovation

Written by Aaron Nathans *The News Journal*  
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The interior of a landmark downtown Wilmington building has undergone a facelift, as a developer looks to add incubator space, conference center, and a lunchtime dining destination to the Hercules Building's roster of attractions.

The building was constructed as a headquarters for Hercules in 1983, paid for by the city and state, with the land provided by DuPont, and the Wilmington Parking Authority providing an underground parking garage. The company was based in the nearby Delaware Trust building, and had been considering leaving downtown or the state entirely.

At the time the building opened, Hercules was the only tenant, and 1,800 people worked in the building, said Paul McConnell, CEO of McConnell Johnson Real Estate, the developer. It was, McConnell said, "the office building of the future," one of the first to use cubicles, with large floors, wide-open spaces, and shops.

Today, there are numerous tenants in the building, including Ashland, which bought Hercules four years ago – albeit with only a small presence now in the building. Hercules never owned the building, and McConnell Johnson [purchased](#)

the 12-story building, located at 1313 N. Market St., in 2005.



McConnell Johnson is midway through the \$20 million project, and the developer invested \$2 million to upgrade the building's heating, cooling and electric systems, and to build a new atrium. Future plans are to add a conference center, restaurants and a fitness center, and to relocate a new [business](#)

incubator into the building.



"This will be the most exciting building in Wilmington," said T.J. Healy, executive director of Film Delaware, one of the tenants at the nascent incubator.

McConnell Johnson's contractors installed a new ground floor in the building. Previously, there was an open space from which greenery and escalators emerged from the basement level. This allowed the sun to spill into the building and give workers a place to cross paths, McConnell said.

"It's brightened up the whole area," Healy said.

McConnell said there are plans to add restaurants like Bain's Deli and Saladworks, as well as a coffee shop with [outdoor](#)

seating. In its previous incarnation, the idea was to serve the people in the building, working for a single business.



But now they will seek to make it a destination to attract people from the outside, he said.

Healy called it "one-stop [shopping](#)

" for tenants, as entrepreneurs and established businesses find ways to work with each other and exchange ideas.



The incubator, which will take up the northwest corner of the ground floor, will be named the McConnell Johnson Innovation Center, and is intended to attract [technology](#)

, finance and media start-ups. The new incubator is now temporarily housed at 1201 Market St., as its two tenants



await the completion of renovations.

Current tenants are the [disaster recovery](#)

consulting firm Continuity Dynamics, and Film Delaware, which works to attract film, television, documentary  and film producers to Delaware.

McConnell Johnson also plans a 10,000-square-foot conference center to be operated by The Hub, an organization based in Philadelphia.

With so many businesses allowing telecommuting, businesses need to provide a justification for employees to congregate in an office every day, McConnell said. “We have to make our buildings more relevant,” McConnell said.

Current tenants in the building include Conde Nast, Potter Anderson & Corroon, Pepper Hamilton, Visa USA, Wilmington [Insurance](#)

, as well as Ashland.



McConnell Johnson has had the plans to remake the building from the time the company bought it, but “it took us a long time to get here. The market had to come to us,” McConnell said.

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