

'COLUMBIAN' MULLS MOVE TO NEW HOME

With 'The Oregonian' looming large across the river, midsize Washington daily assesses operational needs

BY JIM ROSENBERG

NEXT MONTH, *THE COLUMBIAN* CONVERTS TO MORN-
ing publication, one year after its Saturday edition
made its debut. But the staffed-up, 110-year-old
Vancouver, Wash., daily has bigger plans as it en-
ters a new century — modernizing production and
quite possibly relocating its entire operation to a new building on a
new site some time in the next five years.

The 52,500-circulation (63,500 Sundays) newspaper in a city
that has grown to an *E&P*-estimated 57,000 residents serves a
market of 238,000, with al-
most 89,000 households,
according to 1990 data. But
it sits just across the Co-
lumbia River from a metro
competitor, *The Oregonian*
in Portland.

The paper was among the
earliest to operate a big off-
set press, buying one of the
first Goss Metros about 30
years ago. A Goss Commu-
nity assists with company
and contract work. Never-
theless, it's looking at all
new equipment, and it
won't move the old presses
and platemakers should it
decide to relocate, according
to the paper's architect and
planning consultant.

At this point, it has no new-equipment
plans and is studying technologies as they
come on the market. "We're open to any-
thing" and not tied to particular manufac-
turers or processes, not even offset
printing, said Publisher Scott Campbell,
whose family owns the paper.

With "a 5½-acre site for a newspaper
that deserves to have 10 to 15 acres," said

Campbell, a decision on the paper's future
home is likely within a year. His 45-year-
old plant originally encompassed 27,000
square feet and now occupies 120,000
square feet. Successive additions, said the
publisher, have created a "chopped-up pro-
duction flow and a pretty inefficient plant
design. So when we ran the numbers on
what it would cost to remodel and bring

everything up to standard ... it was about
85% to 90% of what it would cost to build
brand-new."

Earlier in the year, Campbell told *The
Business Journal* in Portland that a new
plant was estimated to cost between \$20
million and \$30 million, and half again as
much to equip it.

In the meantime, "We've been very
busy on both presses," said Campbell. The
Metro handles most of the daily's work,
while the Community runs commercial
jobs and the paper's TV programming
guide and real-estate booklet.

The company already owns the site of
its possible future home — an ample par-
cel at the Vancouver Airpark, a mile and a
half from its current West Eighth Street
quarters. Said Campbell, "This is a very,
very good alternative to our existing loca-
tion," where more modern facilities "can
be shoehorned in," but only by making
"many compromises." One would be the
need to build "expensive elevated parking
structures" across the street. Others in-
clude design features that would not be
desirable in a new plant.

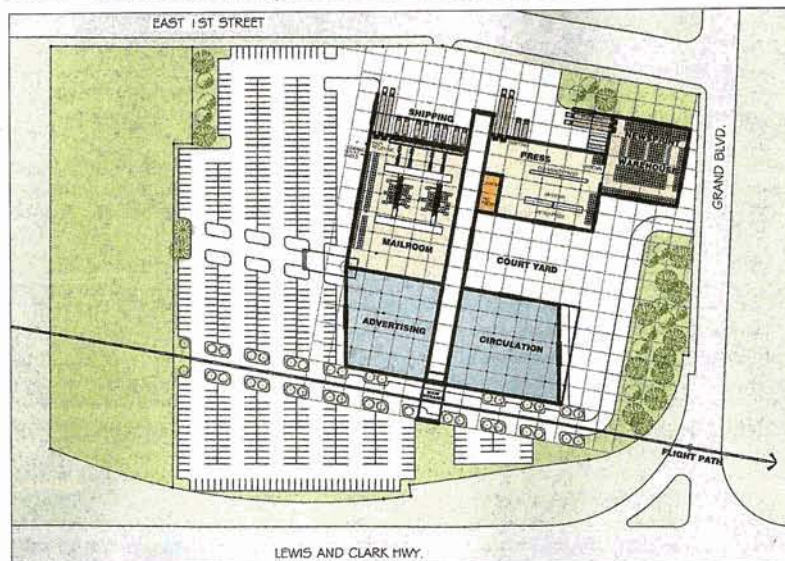
For assistance in planning and design,
Campbell turned to Dario Designs Inc.

Roughly halfway
through Dow Jones'
three-year, \$250-million
project to boost full-
color and page capacity
to its 19 presses at plants
nationwide (*E&P*, Oct.
31, 1998), the Framing-
ham, Mass., firm is re-
sponsible for design,
engineering (structural,
mechanical, electrical,
plumbing, and fire pro-
tection), construction,
administration, and co-
ordination with all press
and support systems.

Still, the growing archi-
tectural and consulting
firm has found time for
numerous other projects
during the same period.

Among them are two other family-owned
dailies in the Pacific Northwest that have
upgraded their operations — *The Bulletin*,
Bend, Ore., and *The Wenatchee* (Wash.)
World (*E&P*, Oct. 17, 1998).

The company spent months in a "pro-
gramming" effort to define *The Colum-
bian's* needs by researching its business and
interviewing managers, asking about prod-



Architect's layout of proposed new *Columbian* plant and offices (to include newsroom)

ucts and procedures and where it wants to be within a given time, according to President Dario D. Dimare.

"Once we know someone's marketing

ment with current client practices, evaluating every aspect of both.

Dario Designs came up with two master plans — one for the existing downtown site,

struction-cost estimates and schedules.

Like Arlington Heights' *Daily Herald*, just west of Chicago, and Bergen County, N.J.'s *The Record*, just west of New York,

The Columbian continues to thrive in proximity to bigger competitors. Very often, content and production quality enable these and other family-owned midsize dailies to shine in the shadows of neighboring chain-owned major metros. In *The Columbian's* case, however, the chain that

owns the metro also is a family affair.

Growth in *The Columbian's* market makes it a fertile field for commercial competition. But while Campbell ac-

goals, the market defines the product," he said, outlining the logical sequence of creating a master plan. "The product defines the equipment and people needed to produce it," he continued, adding that people and equipment then determine the required facilities, which in turn "tells us if the site's adequate."

Results appear in a giant, 20- to 40-page spreadsheet covering everything from staffing to systems to vending machines and including the paper's projections for the year ahead. Based on that information, Dimare's firm can "draw up a floor plan that shows everything over the long term," as well as "a phasing plan to show how to get there, based on [client] priorities." The work also includes assessments of return-on-investment that compare available equip-

ment with current client practices, evaluating every aspect of both. Dario Designs came up with two master plans — one for the existing downtown site,

bility, highway access, distribution demographics, and the value of a continuing downtown presence.

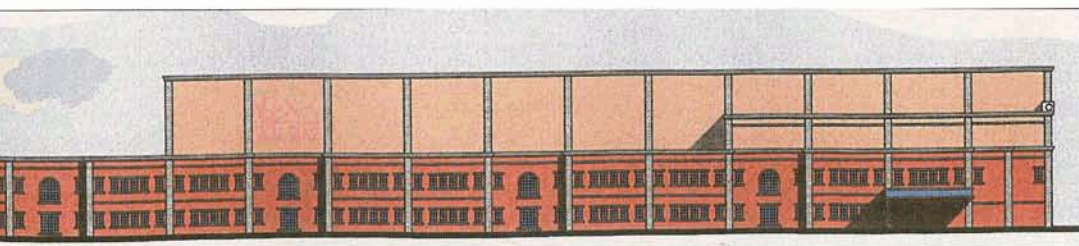
Dimare stressed that the project hasn't been a private process of managers and consultants. Campbell, he said, invited his staff to see the plans and contribute their own comments. For his part, Dimare explained the required materials and the nature of newspaper operations to three local contractors from whom he sought con-

knowledge that his cross-river rival has a strong presence in his own Clark County (where *Oregonian* sales of 22,200 daily and 26,600 Sunday were unchanged over the past two years, according to Audit Bureau of Circulations publisher's statements), he contends that "we still are the main newspaper here, and will continue to be. ... But they've always been quite gentlemanly about their competition."

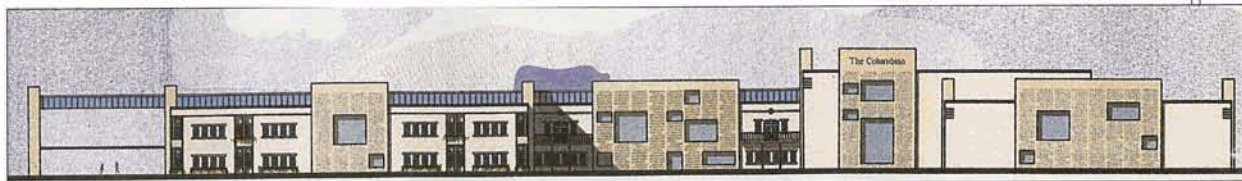
Whether or not that arises from events dating to the days of letterpress and labor strife (see sidebar), *The Oregonian* and *The Columbian*, like other pairs of papers, maintain a reciprocal production agreement.

About 10 years ago, *The Oregonian* lost electricity and *The Columbian* geared up to pitch in on page production before power was restored. Then, just a few years later, the gesture was returned.

Approximately 5,000 copies into a press run, it was Vancouver's turn to lose power, as a hurricane — three hours from reaching maximum winds — threatened to force authorities to close highways. Campbell remembered putting page negatives into a truck headed for Portland, where *The Oregonian* stood ready to burn plates and print *The Columbian*. But on further thought, he said, the plan was scuttled — to avoid sending young carriers out into a storm or its immediate aftermath. ■



Elevation showing length of production area in proposal for more-traditional structure at the paper's existing site



Walls of proposed structure for the larger property use nameplate, block-face effects, and windows to simulate news pages

Smuggled into a pressroom

IN 1959, AT THE START OF A five-year strike against Portland, Ore., newspapers, Don P. Campbell, then general manager of *The Columbian* in neighboring Vancouver, Wash., was among the area's few nonunion people able to run a newspaper press.

At the Newhouse-owned *Oregonian*, recalled *Columbian* Publisher Scott Campbell, "My dad was actually smuggled in on a mail truck and slept on newsprint rolls and helped them get on their feet for the first week or so of the strike. So *The Oregonian* has been incredibly gracious in



Don P. Campbell

telling that story to their own people."

Strikers, meanwhile, printed their weekly *Reporter*, which circulated up to 78,000 copies.

Before the National Labor Relations Board ruled it illegal four years later, the strike had taken a violent turn. Delivery trucks were dynamited and Vice President and Production Director Donald R. Newhouse

(cousin of Advance Publications founder S.I. Newhouse) was wounded in the hip by a shotgun fired into his home. No one was charged. By early 1965, the U.S.'s third-longest newspaper strike was over.