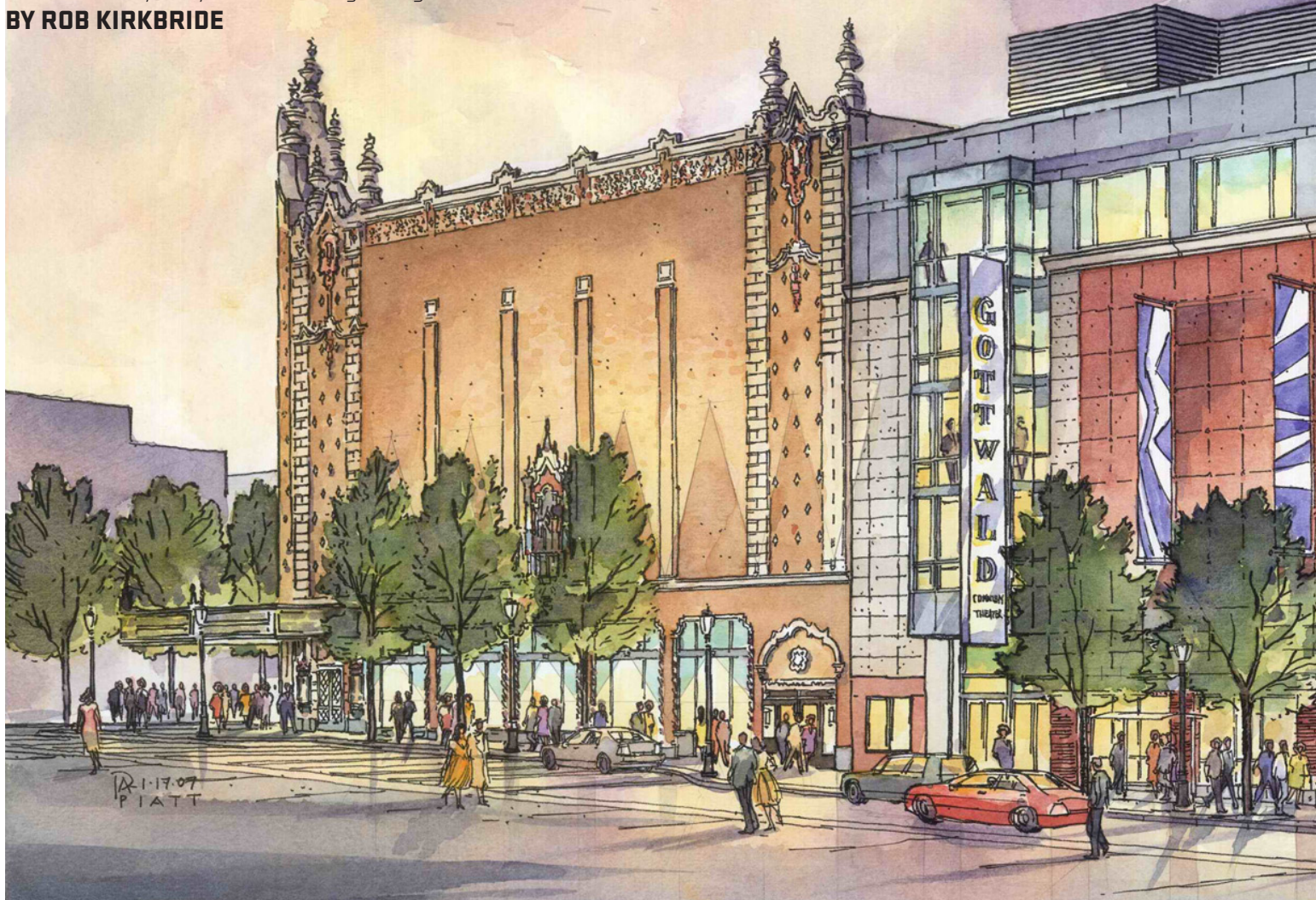




# Dealer on a Roll

The economy may be stumbling along, but Smarter Interiors is on a roll.

BY ROB KIRKBRIDE



**T**he economy may be stumbling along, but Smarter Interiors is on a roll. The Richmond, Va. HNI Corp. dealer recently landed the contract to supply the furnishings for one of the highest profile projects in the state.

Richmond CenterStage, a much heralded (and at times controversial) performing arts complex is a community jewel, anchored by the Carpenter Theatre, Libby Gottwald Community Playhouse, Rhythm Hall and Showcase Gallery.

The project is a \$73.5 million shot in the arm for the community and an important and hard fought \$550,000 contract for Smarter Interiors. Smarter Interiors received its first shipment of furniture from Allsteel last month. Richmond CenterStage opens with a VIP event Sept. 11 and a public open house the next day.

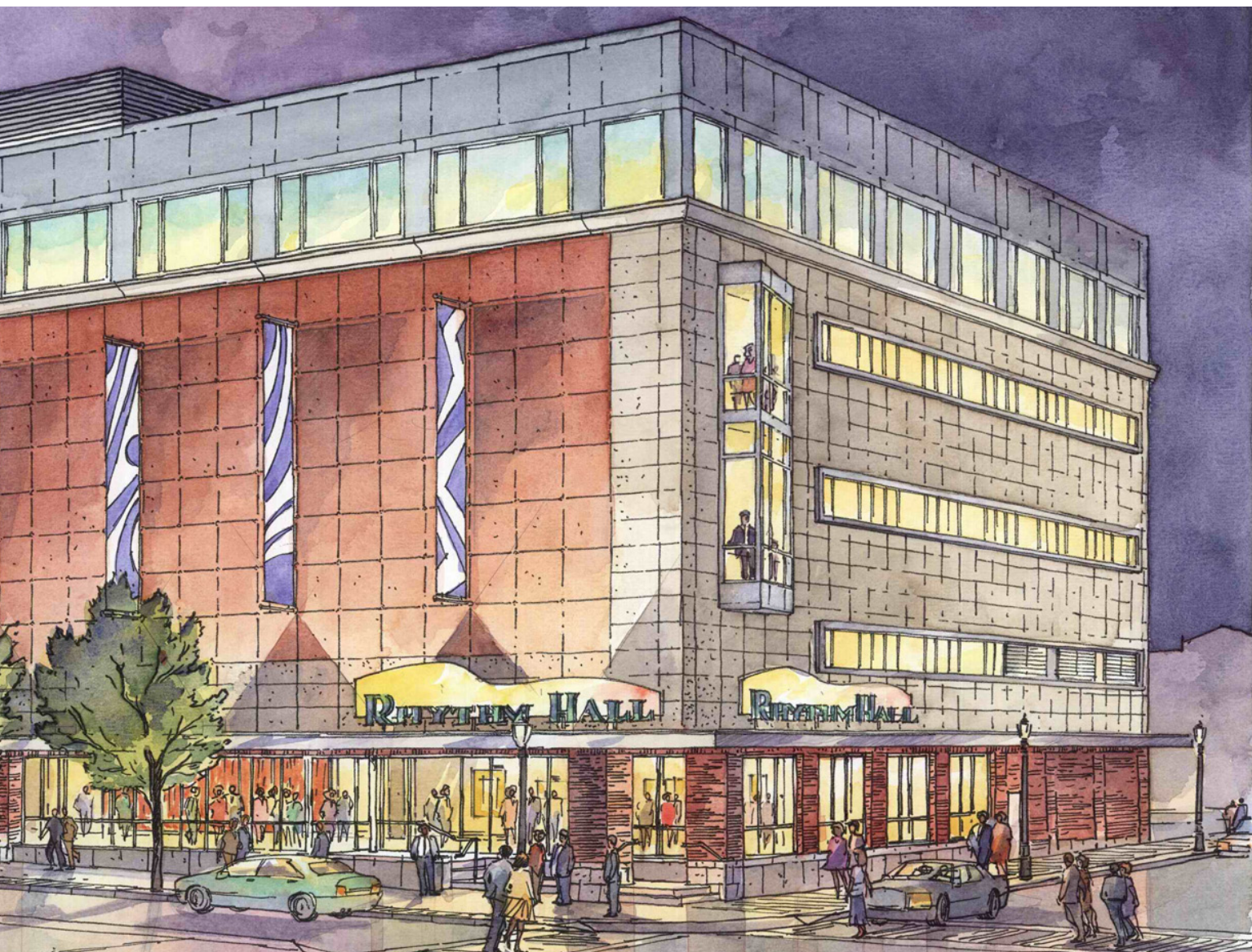
That didn't give Smarter Interiors much time to receive and install the furniture, according to Greg Campbell, one of the firm's principals. "It is going to be a significant challenge," he said. "There are still a lot of trades working in there and stage equipment being delivered. We've been working on a time schedule to figure out how many trucks we can get in there and what kind of (shipping) dock time we can expect. The last

week of August we put everything in.

"It is one of those projects out there that is very visible and that everybody knows about. Richmond CenterStage is a landmark in the city and there was a lot of press about it. It is a nice win for Smarter Interiors."

Smarter Interiors will supply and install furniture for the performance theater, production support spaces, reception areas, ticket booth, break areas, private offices, open offices and educational classrooms. Richmond CenterStage was designed by the Boston architecture firm Wilson Butler Architects. Smarter Interiors is filling the spaces with a mix of mostly Allsteel and Gunlocke products for the private offices, open offices and meeting areas.

The space is modular and can be changed as the need arises or added onto if the staff grows. The open office workstations were designed for collaboration, with an unobstructed view to the outside. It was important to the architects that the furniture match the period architecture of the historic portions of the buildings, Campbell said. It also had to fit equally well with the new areas. "They really like the Allsteel Terrace product," he said.



In addition to Terrace, Smarter Interiors also used David Edward bar stools in the donor's lounge and orchestra pit and American Seating furniture in the classrooms. HBF sofas and textiles are being used, along with Marquis Seating lounge furniture. Many different brands of furniture were brought together to outfit the project.

Campbell said Smarter Interiors won the competitive bidding process in part because of its strong design team, lead by Senior Designer Susan O'Kelly, who Campbell said has a solid understanding of the campus and a great respect for Richmond's new landmark project. Smarter Interiors also has worked closely with the staff of SMG to coordinate the furnishings. SMG is a Philadelphia-based venue management company that oversees the day to day operations of Richmond CenterStage and the Coliseum for their client, RPAC Inc., the operator of RCS. "We knew we needed to provide furnishings that would enhance the new state-of-the-art performing arts center, meet their programming requirements, be completed rapidly, and within budget," Campbell said.

While the Richmond CenterStage project is one of the highest profile in the area, Smarter Interiors also has a hand in

some other major local projects. The company recently secured a \$700,000 job to furnish the local transit authority's new headquarters and maintenance building. Smarter Interiors also won the bid for a major project at the nearby Fort Lee Army base. In all, the company has secured four major projects so far this year.

"We are very pleased to have these projects in such a down economy," Campbell said.

He attributes the dealer's success to its organization. The dealer runs lean with Campbell and his partner and fellow industry veteran Randy Alderson directly out in front of the company's customers. The co-owners are supported by a small, but experienced support staff. "Our customers work directly with us, directly with the owners and decision makers of this company," Campbell said. "They don't have to wait for someone to go back and get answers from the owners."

The company was founded in 2001 and its capabilities include space planning; new, recycled and refurbished furniture; custom product sourcing; project management, installation and service; and move management. ¶