

Looking Back and Moving Forward

As I was receiving articles for Lab-Oratory, it quickly became apparent that the theme of this issue would focus on what is new at the state laboratory. However, just briefly, I would like to reflect on the old.

In December and January, boxes were being packed, checklists were being compiled, and many meetings were being held to ensure that the move of a large and complex organization would be smooth and efficient. It seemed a long time coming. Our new building had been talked about for years, and more than a few doubted it would ever happen. When the time finally did arrive to bid farewell to the Bath Building, our home of almost 40 years, there was a mix of emotions. Many employees liked the downtown atmosphere with nearby restaurants, coffee shops and museums. Our neighbors included the Governor's Mansion and the legislative building, and it was exciting to feel the history there. And then there was the Bath Building itself. Built in 1972, the building had definitely served its purpose. As we sought to add new laboratory tests and equipment, there was no doubt our organization had outgrown the space. Surrounded by city blocks, parking for employees and visitors was always a concern. The heating and air conditioning systems had long ago ceased to work properly. And the elevators – they were for the risk-takers seeking a thrill as to where they would end up, if they went anywhere at all!



The Bath Building, former home of the North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health.

Yet in spite of all the creaks and groans of an aging building, many of us could not help leaving without some fond memories. The brightly decorated Christmas tree in the lobby brought a smile to many faces every December. Raffle baskets, cards of encouragement for co-workers, flower arrangements and fundraiser chocolate bars often adorned the reception desk. The Employee of the Quarter greeted us from a framed poster as we stepped into the elevators.

The second floor classroom was the scene of many employee celebrations, including retirements, wedding and baby showers, potluck lunches, Lab Week activities and holiday parties, all planned and carried out to celebrate each other and working together as a family. In the last couple of years, the second floor hallways were filled with floor plans and pictures of the groundbreaking and subsequent construction phases of our new building. These hallways became the gathering places for discussing and planning the details of our future workplace.

The laboratory floors of the Bath Building hold their own memories for many who have devoted their entire careers to working to improve the health of North Carolinians. The numerous labs and hallways on these floors were sometimes described as a maze and often baffled new employees, vendors and students as they attempted to navigate through them. As the rooms were packed up and emptied for the move, it was sometimes difficult to discern one area

from another. But for those who worked in them, these rooms hold memories of co-workers, of the pride felt when problems were solved as a team, of times when instruments were down and everyone went the extra mile to keep samples viable and get testing done as soon as possible, of laughing and sometimes crying together over personal triumphs and tragedies, and of making friendships that will last a lifetime.

We worked together as a family in the Bath Building, and families do not dissolve over a change in location. We now have windows instead of concrete walls, spacious grounds instead of city streets, and room to grow instead of cramped spaces. One thing that has not changed is the people and the dedication to their jobs. While we bid farewell to the Bath Building, we will keep our old memories and look forward to making new ones

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