

# *Mini-Storage* **Messenger**

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THE ORIGINAL VOICE OF THE SELF-STORAGE INDUSTRY

# Divine Design

2007 SELF-STORAGE  
Facility of the Year Winner

DUNWOODY STORAGE

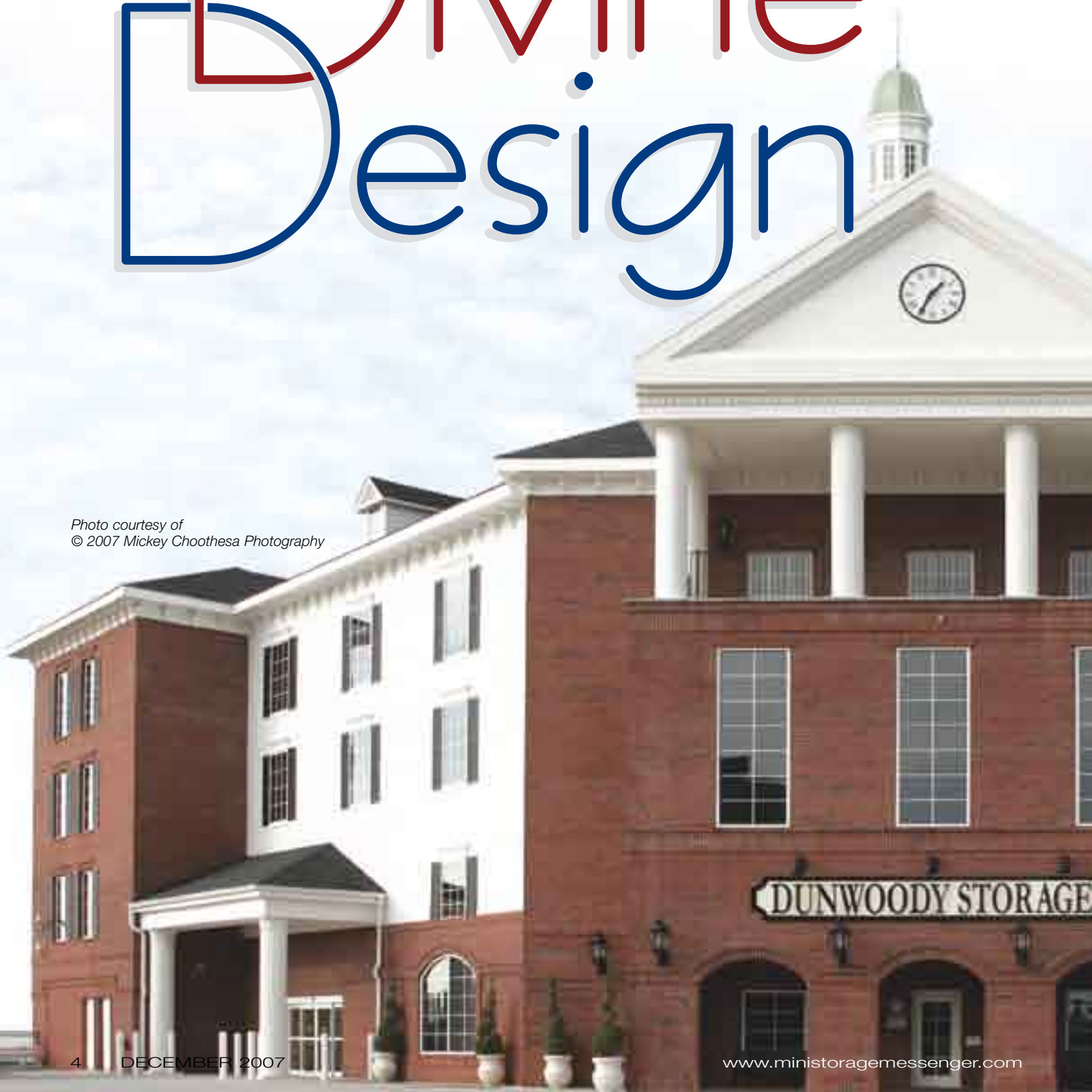
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2007 SELF-STORAGE FACILITY OF THE YEAR OVERALL WINNER

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*Photo courtesy of  
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# DUNWOODY SELF STORAGE • SANDY SPRINGS, GEORGIA

By Jennifer LeClaire

It's an office building. It's a bank. It's a church. No, it's Dunwoody Self Storage—and it's the *Mini-Storage Messenger* 2007 Self-Storage Facility of the Year Overall Winner.

Making this an even more outstanding accomplishment, owner Tom Linder has developed, built, and sold commercial properties in the past, but Dunwoody was his first shot at self-storage. In fact, Linder was involved in dozens of businesses over his entrepreneurial career, including cable TV, importing and exporting agricultural products, and food brokerage. So why self-storage?

"As I drove down the road in the cable TV business, I couldn't go anywhere without seeing storage," Linder says. "I was always fascinated by the business and thought it was a good idea and that I'd like to try it." Linder didn't only try it; he pulled out all the stops to build one

of the best facilities in the region. It was a long process that started with finding the ideal location and will continue through an expansion next year.

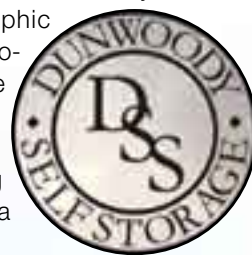
Initially, Linder spent four and a half months analyzing the metro Atlanta market before he decided on what he deemed the "perfect site." Here were his requirements: an upscale urban area with growth potential and a prosperous business and residential base. In order to find the right site, Linder undertook a survey of every road in the region where at least 15,000 cars drove by a day. His search yielded several possible candidates. Then he chose the site that stood the best chance of getting zoning approval for self-storage.

Nevertheless, Dunwoody doesn't sit on your ordinary self-storage site. It is located at the intersection of two major multi-lane roads on prime property that would

normally be home to a bank or a fast-food restaurant. As such, Dunwoody enjoys exposure to more than 50,000 cars per day with Home Depot® and Costco® as its next-door neighbors.

Within a two-mile radius, which includes the cities of Dunwoody and Sandy Springs, you'll find two Fortune 500 company headquarters, a major regional shopping mall, and thousands of upscale single-family dwellings, condominiums, and apartment homes. Extend that circle to a three-mile radius and you'll find a population of over 100,000 with median family incomes greater than \$100,000 a year.

The demographic and community profile for the area were dreams come true for Linder. Moreover, getting the zoning for the site was a potential nightmare.



## FACTS AT A GLANCE

### Owner

Tom Linder

### Facility Management

Annox Management, LLC

### Architect

Tuck, Stinard and Associates

### Architect - Thematic

Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart,  
Stewart & Associates, Inc.

### Builder

Cook Enterprises

### Doors & Interior Systems

Janus International

### Security System

Digitech International

### Management Software

SMD Software

### Roof Provider

D & D Roof

## Going Above And Beyond

Linder took a different approach to winning the hearts of city officials. Instead of trying to see how little he could do, he set out to build a facility with a design that would become a community asset. Linder stretched the design aesthetics as much as the economics would allow, and sometimes even more.

"A good design doesn't have to cost more than a bad design," Linder explains, offering an analogy about women's clothes. "Two women can spend the same amount of money on outfits and one looks more appealing than the other. Good building design is the same way."

Todd Stalder, a thematic designer for the Atlanta-based architecture firm of Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart & Associates, designed Dunwoody Self Storage's exterior. The concept draws from the design well of the region's local buildings to compliment Colonial and Williamsburg architectural styles. "Halfway through the construction, no one had the slightest idea what the use of the building was," Stalder says. "This building has the potential and flexibility to serve as other uses."

Red brick and white siding construction, windows with shutters, arches, mansard

roof, columns, and a porch make Dunwoody look more like a college or a hotel than a self-storage facility—and Stalder knows hotels, having designed his share of five-star resorts over his 25-year career. The cupola—complete with weathervane, the stamped concrete, and the clock tower add the accents that make the difference. The final touch: a lantern style and street pole lighting to give the property around-the-clock visibility, curb appeal, and aesthetic character.

"We had to blend in with the existing Dunwoody flavor and major Class A office buildings and retail centers," says James Tuck, principal at Tuck Stinard Associates, an architecture firm in Kennesaw, Ga. "Coming up with the right design was a major hurdle to getting this project done, but we did it."

Linder had the odds stacked against him in more ways than one. Dunwoody was the third self-storage project on the agenda in that very planning meeting. The Fulton County Planning and Zoning Commission already killed the first two. Linder was expecting the worst, but was pleasantly surprised when the spokesperson from the Coalition of Neighborhoods stood up in support of the facility. "It was such a surprise that all the commissioners started laughing," Linder recalls. "We didn't have to change anything."

To Linder's further surprise, the local government even allowed two large monument signs to be placed in the landscaped area, closer to traffic rather than in the parking area—their normal required location. Linder believes Stalder's rendering, which included the monument signs surrounded by a beautiful flower garden, helped city officials visualize the big picture.

"The lesson there is if you can help people visualize something that's good for them," Linder says, "then they have a basis to agree with you."

## Construction Challenges 101

Getting approval on a brilliant design is one thing. Building the facility was another.

The building is 148,000 square feet with 111,662 net rentable square feet, including 1,100 square feet of office space. But the site area is a mere 1.2 acres. The building was constructed within 18 inches of the back property boundary. That tight fit made room for vehicles, loading areas, and parking to flow well.

"This was an incredibly tight site," says Mitchell Cooke, president of Cooke Enterprises, the Kennesaw, Ga.-based general contractor who built the facility. "The terrain and the topography of the land were sloping. So when you look at the facility from the street, you are entering from the third floor with two floors underground. But on the backside of the facility, the first two floors are not underground. It was a challenge to get it out of the ground." It took 15 months to build the facility.

The roof was fairly standard except for the gutter system, says Bruce Darling, president of D&D Roofing based in Marietta, Ga. "We had to run the down spouts into a box gutter ... it was more like a four-sided trough that ran the length of the building to an area to drain," he explains. "In 20 years, we've never done it like that, but we couldn't put the drain under the grass because of the property's elevation, so we had no choice."

## A Look Inside Dunwoody

The interior of Dunwoody picks up where the exterior left off. Tuck Stinard



Associates is behind the design. When entering the facility from the outside, you're greeted by a lobby designed by Temple, Ga.-based Janus International: a white metal panel system for both the walls and ceiling, with recessed covered lights as in the corridor soffit system.

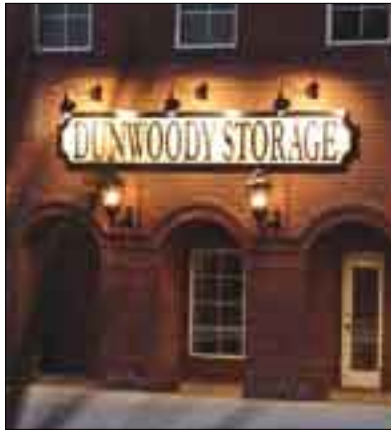
The retail area is designed to accent the exterior theme of the facility, with the brick wall reaffirming the colonial style. In fact, the first thing you see when you enter the retail area is a brick back wall with three 42-inch plasma monitors displaying the feed from security cameras

and a computer-generated map of the facility. Indeed, Dunwoody offers all the high-tech bells and whistles you would expect in a self-storage facility of its caliber, including access control with multiple layers of keypad access to enter various parts of the building, video surveillance, door alarms, and a music intercom system.

"The type of customers Dunwoody is attracting demand security," says Alex Lekes, Southeast account manager for Digitech International, an Asheville, N.C.-based self-storage security systems company. It wasn't cut-and-dried, though. "Dealing with multiple floors is more challenging than single-story buildings. It requires more planning and forethought to navigate through the building's infrastructure."

Another component that demands your attention is customer service area and its granite countertops. High ceilings, painted black, and a mix of black track lighting and canister lamps accent the retail area and office, which includes two executive offices, a conference room, support staff cubicles, and a reception area. Black metal displays for boxes, a sitting area, and two workstations with wireless and wired access for customer use are spaced throughout the area. Combined, these features create an office appearance distinct and true to the Dunwoody Self Storage concept.

Leaving the office and entering the facility, visitors walk into a well-lit corridor with soffit systems that don't recessed covered fixtures and white metal unit construction, set against a grey speckled epoxy granite floor. Diamond plate covers the wall bases, the front of the units, and the corners. The goal was to deliver a clean, finished appearance. The floors of the retail area, lobbies, and corridors are epoxy granite, which offers a visually clean and finished appearance. The facility has two different types of floors: a harder, amber-colored texture epoxy installed in both the retail area and the main floor lobbies, and a smooth, gray version in all



the corridors and the remaining elevator lobbies. While the epoxy gives the facility a polished feel, if damaged, it is easily repaired.

### **Wine Units And All!**

Dunwoody Self Storage offers 972 climate-controlled units ranging in size from 5-by-5 to 21-by-25. The units are eight feet high, with the exception

of the entry-level units, which are nine feet high. They are white metal with white roll-up doors, accented by a matching white metal soffit system. The white panels were chosen in order to take maximum advantage of light reflection and to create an inviting image to women customers. Janus International designed and installed these units as well as the 12 elevator lobbies throughout the structure. Janus also custom-designed the elevator lobby metal system.

Beyond the traditional storage units, Dunwoody boasts a sophisticated wine storage area covering 1,444 square feet and spanning 49 lockers that range from 4-by-3-by-4 to 5-by-8. The wine area uses Kramer equipment to keep the temperature between 51 and 55 degrees and the humidity between 70 and 75 percent. Veriteq monitoring equipment electronically monitors the temperature and humidity of the room and is managed remotely by an off-site security vendor.

Dunwoody wine customers, along with facility employees, have access to the area via a single elevator that serves only the wine storage on the first floor. A separate, standalone electric generator automatically provides power to the wine storage in the event of a power failure. These special wine units were designed and installed by Janus International. Dunwoody Senior Manager Robert Leeper says, "We made each of our wine units larger because of our experience with other facilities where they were smaller than customers desired."

Interestingly, Linder's original plans

didn't include wine storage. But potential tenants who stopped by the Dunwoody's sales trailer in Home Depot's parking lot clamored for it. "We didn't have any idea there would be a market for wine storage," Linder explains. "But it turns out, these high-priced condominiums don't have enough room for the folks to store their wine."

Linder and his team knew next to nothing about wine storage; therefore, they studied the business and visited wine storage venues. They took the best features from the competition and incorporated them into the product. The wine units, which are very large compared with other units in the Atlanta market, are renting fast. Meanwhile, an affiliated company, Dunwoody Records Management, LLC, is rapidly filling the first floor of the building.

### **The Marketing Plan**

Lease-up at Dunwoody, which opened in January 2007, has blown away expectations. By early August, the net gain of unit rentals has exceeded one rental per day. That equals about 30 percent occupancy after only seven months. Part of that success is based on pre-marketing of the facility. A "sales office" trailer was set up with bright signage. Dunwoody also designed a four-color brochure that promotes its features to its major target markets: residential, business, records, and wine storage. The brochure was mailed to 2,500 businesses and 15,000 nearby residents in single-family, apartment, and condominium homes.

In addition to contributions to local events and groups, client services manager Charles Anderson visited over 1,000 businesses in the area prior to the facility opening. While this may be an unusual tactic for the self-storage industry, Linder sees it as a vital strategy.

"I came from the cable TV industry," Linder says. "I built 24 suburban TV systems in my time and you have to go door to door and talk to everybody when you're in that business. We felt we could do the same thing here. We explained the product to people. There wasn't any real salesmanship involved. We just introduced ourselves."

Linder is also leveraging the Internet. The store's dynamic Web site not only outlines all the categories of Dunwoody Self Storage, it also provides a clear and vivid "video tour" of the facility. All the various sizes and storage options are clearly outlined, with the option for online reservations. A vibrant *Yellow Pages* ad also draws customers to the facility.


For the facility's management software, Linder chose SMD's SiteLink, which offers reporting and analysis, customer mapping, facility mapping, revenue management, advertising and marketing tracking, e-mail notices, and other features to help managers stay on top of the day-to-day tasks. "Our program helped Dunwoody coordinate the pre-leasing of the facility and will continue to support the facility's day-to-day operations with electronic billing, real-time support, and Web-based tools," says Markus Hecker, marketing director for SMD Software.



### **Staring Down The Competition**

Every element of Dunwoody Self Storage, from its traditional design to the understated secure look of its lobby and corridors, contributes to its marketing plan. Every other element, including the building design, is focused on its market: upscale customers who will pay a premium price for fine service, security, convenience, and professionalism.

Still, Dunwoody Self Storage has plenty of competition. "The results achieved by the homework that we did in selecting this location and our total development team has exceeded my expectations," says Linder. "The exceptional visibility of this landmark complex has set it apart in this competitive market. I hope to be moving forward with the planned 50 percent expansion of the facility in 2008."

Will Linder develop another standout self-storage facility in the future? "I'd like to do this about 10 times," he says. "If I had the opportunity, I would." 

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Jennifer LeClaire is a freelance writer based in Hallandale Beach, Florida. She is a regular contributor to the *Mini-Storage Messenger* magazine and *Self-Storage Now!* Her clients include *The Associated Press*, *The New York Times*, and CBS Television/Winstar Communications.