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Meacham Park undergoes \$20 million in improvements

St. Louis Business Journal - January 27, 2006 by [Anna Jones](#)

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A \$4.5 million renovation of one of the St. Louis metro area's first schools for African-American students is one of the final pieces of a decade-long project to redevelop the Meacham Park neighborhood in southeast Kirkwood.

More than 80 years after the opening of **James Milton Turner School**, the **J. Milton Turner Offices** now serves as the headquarters for the project's three developers -- Steve Beck, president of Stocker Construction; Clayton Skaggs, chiropractor and director of Clayton Physical Medicine; and Scott Krejci, principal of Krejci Associates Architects.

The building, at 1099 Milwaukee St., opened in 1924 and reached its present size in 1948, serving as a school until the mid-1970s. It's about 40,000 square feet total, with 32,000 leasable square feet. Portions of the building are still being built out, but 26,000 square feet already have been leased.

"Most people thought I was nuts, but it's a good space, in a good location; structurally it was sound, it just hadn't been taken care of in a long time," Beck said. It first caught his eye when it was being used as a hardware store. "The structure and the old windows and the big,

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open spaces intrigued me. And for Clayton (Skaggs), we were looking for something with tall ceilings so he could have an exercise area, although it wasn't going to be anything near what we ended up with."

The largest tenant is the 9,000-square-foot **Central Institute for Human Performance**, which opened in November. The state-of-the-art fitness training center is co-owned by Skaggs and Beck. It includes medical rehabilitation facilities and serves some of the area's top names in sports, including St. Louis Blues and NFL players and sports announcer Joe Buck. Central Institute provides military-grade fitness equipment and one-on-one personal training for high-end

athletes and executives focused on being in top condition.

The Central Institute is based in what was once the school's two-story auditorium/gymnasium. A second floor enclosed loft was created to house Beck's and Skagg's offices, which overlook the institute's space.

The Turner School building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and historic tax credits at state (worth 25 percent in assistance) and federal (20 percent) levels combined to provide approximately \$1.5 million in assistance. Charles Clifford and Sanford Scott at The PrivateBank are handling the rest of the financing, Beck said. Kirkwood used \$32,426 in tax increment financing (TIF) for a re-use study on the Turner School building before the redevelopment trio became involved, but no other TIF funds have been used for the project.

All the major systems in the building -- HVAC, electrical, plumbing -- were totally redone. In one wing of the building's basement, the boiler room is being converted into a social gathering spot that can be used for private and neighborhood social events. At the other end will be the home of Masterpeace Studios, a nonprofit whose mission is to embody a mindful and holistic approach to healthy living through the arts, nutrition and yoga for all ages. It's founder is Scott Krejci's wife, Meg, who foresees the studios as a field-trip destination for school children. She is serving as the leasing agent and property manager for Turner Offices until the studios are ready.

Among other tenants are a physicians' office on the second floor that will include the school's original nurse's office, and a Pilates classroom and a yet-to-be-named center that will offer nutritional and holistic counseling and colon hydrotherapy.

The school, designed in part by renowned architect William B. Ittner, maintains its high ceilings and original tall windows (and ensuing natural lighting), as well as the lockers in the main halls on the two floors.

The project comes on the heels of the city of Kirkwood's efforts to improve run-down portions of the Meacham Park area, which Kirkwood annexed in 1992. To create the funding for the improvements, the city created a TIF district that took the unusual step of incorporating the residential portion of the neighborhood.

"Typically, TIF boundaries are only built around the commercial portion of a project, but in this case, we built it around the entire neighborhood so any incremental revenue... could be put back into the neighborhood," said Claire Budd, public information officer for the city of Kirkwood. "(Kirkwood Commons) was basically the economic engine that created the money that was put back in the neighborhood."

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Kirkwood Commons, a 59-acre shopping center, encompasses about one-third of the original 135 acres of Meacham Park. Wal-Mart, Target and Lowe's Home Improvement Center anchor the commons, which has been completely leased for the last eight months, said Mike Anthon of the Desco Group, which took over from Opus as developer of the project in 1995.

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