Baytown, Texas, is a proud working-class community 30 miles outside Houston, where petrochemical giants Exxon and Chevron are major employers. Its 60,000 residents have struggled through a difficult decade as oil prices have plummeted and the U.S. Steel plant closed, eliminating many jobs.

Despite the depressed economy, community spirit and a competitive zeal prompted Gulf Coast Hospital, which had grown steadily for 30 years, to invest in capital improvements to its facility that would demonstrate to the community, professional staff and patients its commitment to excellence.

Baytown boasts three major hospitals, and hospital officials were concerned that a declining population base and the continuing high cost of first-class medical care would force closure of one or more facilities.

Gulf Coast did not want to be one of them.

Working with an architectural firm in Nashville, TN, that was under contract to Hospital Corporation of America, the parent company that owns Gulf Coast and other facilities throughout the country, hospital officials commissioned a three-story physicians’ office complex on the hospital grounds.

That office building would provide conveniently located space where physicians could see private patients, yet remain close to the hospital to provide in-patient care.

Project architect Dean Baker of Earl Swenson Associates in Nashville said Gulf Coast wanted to create a building that had the look and the feel of a high-class facility while, at the same time, meeting the constraints of a tight budget.

Baker, whose firm has worked with Dryvit Systems, Inc. and its line of exterior insulation and finish systems (EIFS) for a long time, specified an EIFS to provide the flexibility of design that would have been cost-prohibitive with traditional upper-class building materials, such as stone or brick.

The architect noted EIFS provided an additional cost benefit during the construction phase. Because the EIFS is lightweight, the hospital was able to save money that otherwise would have financed a stronger structural support system that could support the load of masonry.

The office complex makes heavy use of reflective glass, both in horizontal stripes throughout two wings of the building and in the central portion, from ground floor to roof, that houses a tropical atrium. To add to the special design, Baker created vertical sculptured ribbing in the spandrels, bounded top and bottom with horizontal bands that were panelized in-shop for efficient
installation.

‘We wanted to give a sculptured feel to the entire section that would have been difficult to do with brick, Baker said.

Providing the corrugated effect posed a challenge to the applicator.

The actual application of the EIFS was performed by Diversified Plastering, Inc., of Houston, which subcontracted the work for Patten Construction of Nashville. Dale Fairbanks, vice president of Diversified Plastering, suggested several modifications of the rib design for consideration by the architect. The final rib design, which featured a flowing, wave look, closely matched the original design.

We had no tools to achieve the ribbed finish,” said Fairbanks. “We invented a matting tool so that we could apply the EIFS into the ribbed or corrugated area.”

**EIFS provided affordable design flexibility**

Fairbanks said he spent a week designing a tool out of hard neoprene, a plastic compound that matched the dimensions of several ribs. His work crew applied the EIFS and adhesive base coat to only two to three ribs at a time, instead of using a flat trowel to apply the layers of the EIFS the way they would to a flat surface.

The office tower opened last January, enabling physicians to move their offices from older quarters, and allowing the hospital to expand its professional staff and still have additional space available for future growth. The new building internally makes great use of open space, with private offices overlooking the three-story atrium in the building’s center. Light shines through the glass wall and through strategically placed skylights.

Hospital officials were so pleased with the results that, within five months, they contracted to retrofit the existing hospital complex.
comprised of an original building that had been added onto four times, giving it a “disjointed appearance,” according to Hospital Administrator Linda Hischke.

This was a much larger job for Diversified Plastering. The new office building required 15,000 square feet of EIFS installation, but the retrofit that resulted from it totaled 57,000 square feet.

Those buildings, constructed in 1959, 1967, 1972, 1974 and 1975, were covered with stucco, metal, brick and block. “It looked like a patchwork quilt,” Fairbanks said. “They wanted it to match the new construction. We were able to handle the various substrates with a minimum of problems. We made it look like one big job.”

Major problems were encountered with the stucco, which had cracked and delaminated where water had seeped through. Fairbanks said he had to remove some areas of stucco and replaster it to the original surface. He also recaulked around the windows to eliminate water leaks.

A four-foot parapet was tied onto the roof of one of the one-story buildings to make the roof line even with a second one-story building next to it that had been built higher. Wood soffits were replaced with soffits covered with EIFS, prompting Fairbanks to comment, “They won’t have to worry about rotting wood or painting or leaking any more.”

The soffits were tied onto steel supports and suspended down about one foot to make them look thicker.

What once was a collection of architecturally unrelated additions and renovations has been transformed, through the use of EIFS and painstaking workmanship, into one uniform building that makes a statement of professional elegance.

The sandalwood beige color finish is extremely popular in the Southwest and West, where adobe-clad structures are common.

Baker, the architect for the office building, said that only an EIFS could provide the design flexibility and aesthetics the hospital needed to dramatize its professionalism to the community—yet do so within a budget that prohibited the use of traditional first-class materials.

Long-range plans call for an additional office building within five to 10 years. Administrator Hischke said the hospital is very pleased with the exterior shell and would like to see the new building blend in with the existing structures.

“EIFS solved our exterior wall maintenance problems and unified our various connecting buildings into a modern structure that has created an enhanced professional image in the community,” Hischke said. “Our community has reacted favorably to our new image, and we are now realizing acceptance and support of our hospital and community programs.”

Entrance to physician’s private office building on hospital grounds. Completion of this project led the hospital to retrofit the existing buildings to match the exterior.