

DECATUR

Internationally Renowned Simons-Eastern Settles in 'The Heart of the City'



Peter Giles
CEO,
Simons-Eastern

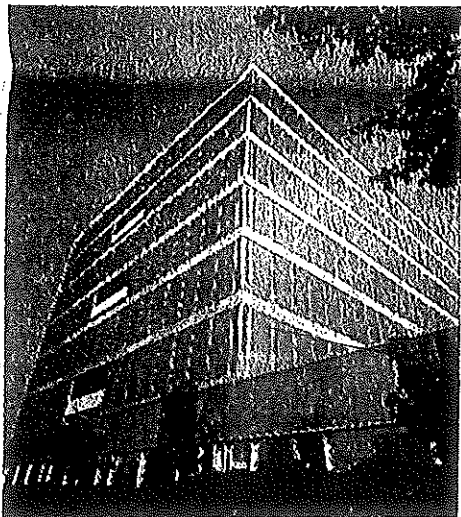
Admittedly, most of the company's Decatur-based employees do not live in the City of Decatur. But a random survey found that no matter how far away they lived, they were contented with the workday environment in Decatur. "We have people from everywhere here," says John Cook, manager of Human and Facility Resources. "We all like the convenience and congeniality we find here."

Simons-Eastern's office building, One West Court Square, is adjacent to the old courthouse and was one of the first office buildings in the new wave of commercial construction that began back in the 1970s. Simons-Eastern owns the 140,000 square-foot building and occupies about two-thirds of it.

Employees like to spend their lunchtimes outside, enjoying a picnic lunch on the courthouse steps. Or playing bocce ball on the shaded lawn. Or strolling through downtown for exercise or errands. "It's just real nice here," says head receptionist, Mary Link, who has worked for the company for 25 years. She moved her residence to Decatur when the company moved there. "Decatur is a changing city with a lot of zest," she says. "I worked in downtown Atlanta for years. I prefer it out here. It's easier and more relaxed.

"Decatur is a people place. That's why we're here." This is the declaration of Peter H. Giles, CEO of Simons-Eastern Consultants Inc., a large international engineering company that settled its headquarters and people right in the heart of the city in Town Center Square.

Decatur may seem an unlikely place to plant a large Canadian-owned company that mainly plans and designs pulp and paper manufacturing facilities for worldwide locations. But to Giles, its small town flavor and friendliness conveniently ensconced in the huge metro Atlanta area, was the perfect spot to set up Simons' U.S. base.



Headquarters, Simons-Eastern



There's no hustle and bustle. And I feel perfectly safe here."

Four of the company's star bocce players, Senior Estimator Charlie Schneider, Computer Analyst "Skip" Jones, and schedulers, Rich Radatz and John Nix, all live outside Decatur, but don't mind their commutes. "Everything's within walking distance here," says Radatz. "You can eat, go to the bank, and run other errands at lunchtime. It's great!"

Radatz lives in Powder Springs, but now drives to MARTA's Hightower Station and hops aboard a train which lets him off right outside Simons-Eastern's building. He likes "being able to walk in the grass around the square. You don't feel like you're in a box with the top off like you do in downtown Atlanta."

Nix travels from Conyers via back roads and finds working in Decatur makes quick shopping easy. If I can't find something here in the city, I can find it close by on the way home," he says.

Russ Harker, vice president of engineering and a Lilburn resident, appreciates "the little bit of green grass and trees. I like the park-like atmosphere." A frequent traveler, he now has an easy 30-minute trip to the airport via MARTA. He also likes the ease of a six-minute train ride to downtown Atlanta.

Giles says parent company, Simons International Ltd., chose Atlanta as the center for its U.S. activities mainly because it is the transportation hub of the Southeast, a major pulp and paper producing region. Simons, headquartered in Vancouver, British Columbia, has 3,000 employees world-wide, with other offices in Toronto, Montreal and Australia, and affiliated companies in Brazil and New Zealand.

A native of New Zealand, Giles joined Simons in 1956 and was a strong proponent of the company's expansion into the United States. Giles says he "scooted around for almost a year" before finally selecting Atlanta and Eastern Engineering as the place and operation to form the American subsidiary. A merger with Eastern in 1970 was the beginning of Simons-Eastern which, besides its Atlanta base, also has an office with 30 employees in Portland, Maine and primary responsibility for the Brazilian operation. Of the division's 675 employees, 50 percent are

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graduate engineers or architects, and the bulk of Simons-Eastern's business is concentrated in the eastern half of the U.S. Giles says that roughly 20 percent of the company's business is international with projects in place or under construction in Kenya, Nigeria, Columbia, Brazil, Venezuela, India, Pakistan, Sweden, Portugal, Australia and New Zealand.

After the formation of Simons-Eastern, Giles moved both his home and the company to Decatur. "I wanted a nice, pleasant working environment for our employees. Decatur satisfied that need admirably."

Now serving as chairman of the Decatur Downtown Development Authority, Giles believes "Decatur will always be a place where people who want to live and work in a quiet, more subdued community. As the county seat, we have the perfect environment for the legal profession, and a large and established residential community that has become an anchor for older residents." He aims to do his part to see that the city "continues its controlled development, raises its tax base, and sustains and nurtures its fine quality of life." □