United Health Care Center  
Westerville, Ohio

Architectural precast concrete proved to be the ideal material in providing a colored aggregate mix, attractive surface textures and a variety of panel shapes for the façade of this corporate headquarters building.

This $10 million building is the new corporate headquarters for United Health Care – a regional health care insurance provider located in Westerville (near Columbus), Ohio. The four-story building covers a total area of 142,000 sq ft (13200 m²) with four nearly equal floor levels of 35,500 sq ft (3300 m²) each.

A major distinguishing feature of the building is its architectural precast façade, which gives the structure a unique setting in its environment. Structural grids of 40 – 25 – 40 ft (12.2 – 7.6 – 12.2 m) from exterior to interior, provide large uninterrupted spaces ideal for open office planning at the perimeter of the building while maintaining a compact central spine for core and building service components. Both the architectural and structural elements of the building were designed by Opus Architects & Engineers.

The building is approached from a tree-lined drive that softens the mass of the structure while defining the main entry of the building. The use of semi-mature landscaping with a bridged permanent water feature helps to reduce the adjacent parking areas into smaller modules. Tree-lined beams also create a buffer from the adjacent freeway traffic while maintaining freeway visibility of the building itself.

From a distance, the scale of the building is in harmony with the site and surroundings. The same sense of scale is heightened as one gets closer to the building and the rich colors and textures can be seen in more detail. Spandrel panels with dimensions of 24 ft x 7 ft (7.3 x 2.1 m) dominate the main facades of the building. These panels are supported from the adjacent floor structure. Color contrast
A canopy extending from the stepped precast elements defines the main entry. The standing seam metal roof is supported visually by precast columns extending from the lobby enclosure to the exterior of the canopy. The stepped massing of the precast concrete at the building cornice reinforces the coloration and profiles of the main building entrance.

The metal roof expression of the canopy is also utilized to be the predominant visual focus for the main roof of the building. The metal roof serves to screen large rooftop mounted mechanical equipment and provides a complementary expression of color to the precast concrete.

Green reflective low-e glass set in black anodized mullions constitutes the majority of the window system. Curtainwall glazing set at both ends of the main building entry and the secondary back entry provide a visual break to the massing of the building.

Precast concrete was selected for this project to ensure the quality and consistency of the complex shapes, textures and finishes that the design demanded. Erection occurred during winter when traditional masonry construction would have been too costly and unable to accommodate the schedule.

Precast concrete offered design flexibility while working within the constraints of the overall project budget. Other labor intensive field applied finishes would not have resulted in the level of quality that this project has. The highly articulated design and construction schedule could not have been performed by any other product.

A total of 374 precast concrete components were produced for this project as follows:
- 80 spandrel panels [24 x 7 ft x 4 in. (7.3 x 2.1 m x 102 mm)]
- 40 cornice panels [24 x 6 ft (7.3 x 1.8 m)]
- 254 column covers and accent pieces with varying dimensions

The precast components were manufactured by Concrete Technology, Inc. at their plant in Springboro. They were shipped by truck-trailer to the project site – a distance of about 90 miles (144 km). The precast contract (production, hauling and erection) was...
$850,000. Actual erection took three months to complete.

This project exemplifies how one material can offer multiple design solutions. Colored aggregate mix, surface finishes, and a variety of shapes permitted the designer to create texture and building massing appropriate for this project. Consistency of accent profiles and continuity of crisp lines were accomplished with architectural precast concrete.

The building was completed in July 1999 and the office was opened to use later that year. In retrospect, the owner and design-construction team are pleased with the architecture and aesthetics of the new facility.

CREDITS
Owner: Columbus Investment Limited Partnership, Columbus, Ohio
Architect: Opus Architects and Engineers, Minnetonka, Minnesota
Structural Engineer: Opus Architects and Engineers, Minnetonka, Minnesota
Contractor: Opus North Construction, Westerville, Ohio
Precast Concrete Manufacturer: Concrete Technology, Inc., Springboro, Ohio