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Virginia opens new forensics lab Thursday

Washington Business Journal - by [Vandana Sinha](#) Staff Reporter

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Virginia will open a new \$62 million forensics laboratory, to be shared by the **Department of Forensic Science** and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, in Prince William County on Thursday.

The standard brick veneer and tranquil parking lot give away nothing of the actual activity inside one of Manassas' newest buildings. On one end, investigators and scientists pore over hair and tissue DNA of some of the state's most dangerous criminals to learn what they did, while at the other, they pry open the dead

bodies of society's latest victims to learn what was done to them.

The lab is located on a 10-acre spot across from **George Mason University's** campus in the massive maze of the Innovation@Prince William County Technology Park.

The 114,000-square-foot building will replace the state 30,000-square-foot headquarters in Fairfax, where officials say the space was bursting at the seams.

"When we moved into the old lab [in 1989], we outgrew it in a year," said Amy Wong, lab director for the Northern Virginia forensics lab, one of four branches statewide. "Coming here, we can go back to being full-service."

Now, the combined space for the Northern Virginia branch of the Department of Forensic Science, which claims 60,000 square feet, and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, claiming 26,000 square feet, is intended to offer room to grow through at least the next decade. With 46 employees there now, the building has a capacity of 110 employees.

The new building also houses a new 26,000-square-foot training suite, an improvement from the old building, where class attendees would have to sit or stand in the back of employee offices. In addition, the evidence vault for the forensics lab, which oversees roughly 10,000 cases at any given time, is up to four times the size of the old, and a larger firearms and ballistics testing area allows investigators to test more powerful weapons than before.

Plus, the new medical examiner's office space allows for storage of as many as 200 bodies in a morgue, as well as a new biosafety lab where examiners can test potentially contagious bacteria or viruses, including anthrax.

The project, which has applied for the silver level of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design green building standards, was built as a public-private partnership deal that Prince William County officials hope will also boost its biotech portfolio.

The state footed the bill, but awarded the overall development contract to Rockville-based **Scheer Partners Inc.**, which transferred the project to McLean-based **Appian Realty Advisors LLC** months later when the latter's founders split off from Scheer in 2007. **DPR Construction Inc.** was the general contractor, with MWL Architects and McKinney and Co. serving as the principal designers and engineers.

The building's opening, hosted by Appian, comes days after the District pulled back a \$133 million construction contract to build its own consolidated forensics lab in Southwest D.C. because of concerns that competing bids weren't properly evaluated. D.C. leaders are planning to erect a \$220 million building on the site of the former Metropolitan Police Department First District Headquarters at 415 4th St. SW.