

# St. Louis Science Center

St. Louis, Missouri

**Role:** Architect and Museum Planner for Science Center Expansion

**Building Area:** 154,000 sf

**Description:** By 1986 it had become clear that a major expansion to the St. Louis Science Center was essential so that this tremendously popular facility could accommodate its expanding audience. Located in the heart of St. Louis, the Science Center was housed in two separate structures. Its public areas, which included a Digistar planetarium surrounded by a small participatory science exhibit area, classrooms and a children's discovery room, were housed in a building at the edge of Forest Park. Offices and other support spaces were housed in an office building directly across from the park. An 8-lane interstate highway and a 4-lane city street separated the two buildings.

In the spring of 1987 we were asked to prepare a Five-Year Comprehensive Master Plan for the proposed expansion and to design its first phase. As part of our initial planning work we assisted Science Center Staff with the development of a new mission, roles and activity programs for an expanded facility. We also projected staffing requirements and prepared a detailed facility program, an estimated capital budget, and an economic feasibility assessment which indicated that the projected 750,000 to 1,000,000 annual visitation to the Science Center would generate sufficient operating revenues to cover the increased operating costs of an expanded facility.

The new 154,000 sq. ft. structure, which replaced the existing office and support building and includes a 17,000 sq. ft. connector facility, opened to the public in November of 1991. The connector facility spans the two major roadways, tunnels under Forest Park, and provides a public connection between the new Science Center building and the Planetarium.

The architectural imagery of the new structures complements the existing Planetarium. Both buildings make strong allusions to space technology: the new structures are complex articulated forms with the design imagery of a futuristic high-tech spaceship, whereas the Planetarium is a pure geometric form hovering like a flying saucer within its setting of grass and trees. The bridge, which appears to telescope out from the Omnimax dome before stretching across the two intervening roadways, helped to instantly establish the St. Louis Science Center as a major architectural icon in the city.





