

MESSENGER

December 2023



Overall Facility Of The Year
Arizona Self Storage
Tucson Foothills

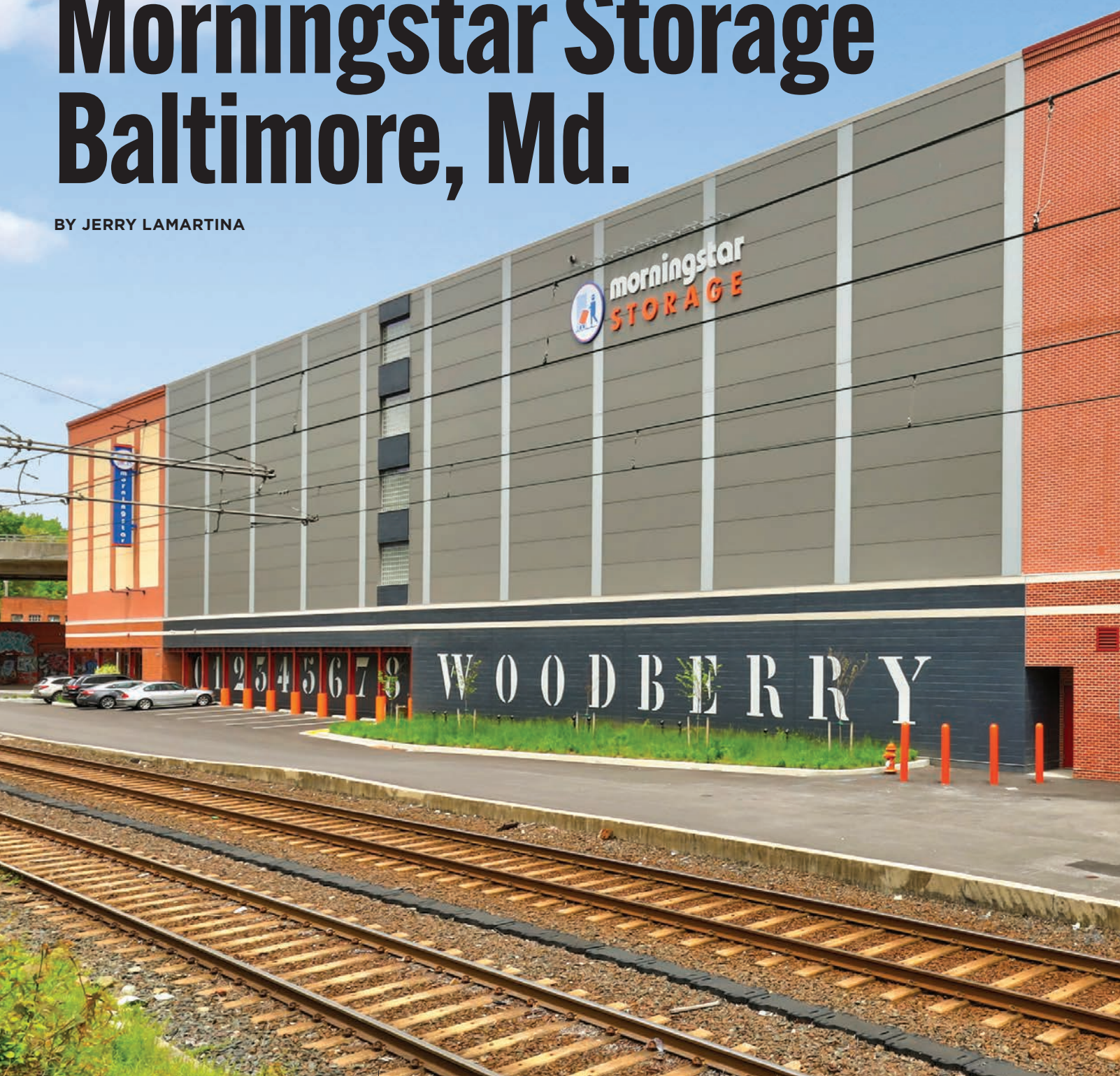
2023 Facility of the Year
WINNERS



2023 Construction Facility Of The Year

Morningstar Storage Baltimore, Md.

BY JERRY LAMARTINA





Morningstar Storage took on an unusual construction challenge when it decided to develop its Union Avenue self-storage facility on the site of the former Schenuit Rubber Tire factory building in Baltimore.

Modern Storage Media took notice and gave the facility its 2023 Facility of the Year award for the construction category. Many elements of the project prompted the publication to give the facility the award.

Because of the former building's historical significance in the city, Morningstar worked with the Woodberry Community Association and Baltimore Heritage to create a museum inside the new facility's office with artifacts from and photos of the building and grounds when Schenuit operated there, according to the company's written application for consideration for the award, including a few tires manufactured at the plant.

A mural on the outside of the building, visible to passing light rail commuters, "serves as a reminder of the site's historical significance, encapsulating the facility's dedication to preserving and celebrating the heritage of the area it proudly serves," the application states.

The former factory building, a past emblem of Baltimore's industrial strength, had fallen into disrepair and was condemned. As the start of work neared, part of the building collapsed and fell to the tracks of the transit system below. Asbestos was discovered and had to be remediated.

The Owner

Thor Heise, vice president of construction for MSC Development, a unit of Morningstar Properties, says the company "had to treat the entire demolition as hot material (contaminated with asbestos). It was terrible."

Another obstacle arose after the company got approval to turn on power for the facility: No transformers were available, related to COVID-19 supply chain disruptions, he says. They had to shut down the building for three months.

Separately from these problems was that the company had to shore up the site by bringing infill material to prepare the ground to support the new



building's load, Heise says. The building cantilevers over the Jones Falls stream. The area is also prone to flooding. A retaining wall was built "to accommodate rising river levels without issues."

"You're digging in the foundation of a building that's a hundred years old," he says. "We ran across all kinds of vaults and slag and a lot of structures underneath the ground that we didn't anticipate."

Morningstar bought the site with plans already in place, he says. It was a unique design for the company. They typically use more precast concrete. The company developed the project as a joint venture with developer Klein Enterprises of Baltimore.

The Union Avenue facility blends materials including insulated metal panels, stucco, and brick. It

incorporates a lot of steel, concrete, and X-bracing to transfer the load back to the foundation, Heise says. The building is rated LEED Silver and has solar panels on the roof. It's the company's first facility with ground-up solar. It also has a remote monitoring and control system for its HVAC system, which he thinks is unique for a storage facility.

The Builder

Chesapeake Construction Group of Owings Mills, Md., was the project's builder. Michael Shevitz, the company's senior project manager, oversaw the project.

Shevitz says one of the main reasons he thinks the project won MSM's award is because of the degree of difficulty in preparing the site to build based on its location and the ground's condition.

One side of the building runs closely alongside the Jones Falls Expressway and the Jones Falls stream underneath it. Another side of the building fronts the 14th Street Bridge. And a third side runs along the light rail system.

Chesapeake ended up changing contractors to demolish the building, saving the owner \$1 million.

"The other huge issue is the site is close to the embankment along the Falls stream," Shevitz says. "We found the material wasn't stable for building the structure on it. We had to undercut the material as much as 15 feet below grade, below the riverbed, and keep water pumped out. We backfilled it with soil cement. Went through a lot of pricing exercises to find the most cost-effective method."

Drivers on Route 83 running past the facility are "very close to it, so it really stands out," he says.

The Architect

Paul Anderson, a project manager with RZ Architecture of Collingswood, N.J., who oversaw the project, says the cantilever element of construction was a particularly interesting part of the project. It enabled extending the structure toward the stream below using layers of stepped-back structural blocks with geofabric wrapping each layer, all tied into footings, rebar, and structural beams. Use of the cantilever allowed for more usable storage space in the facility. The site was narrow, so an interior drive-thru was added to allow tenants to drive their belongings into the building and then take them to their units.





Amenities

Besides the drive-thru, Morningstar Storage offers several key amenities and services to its customers. As for the units, there are heated and cooled spaces in sizes that range from 3-by-5s all the way up to 50-by-20s. They even have a few uncommon sizes to better meet customers' needs, such as 5-by-15s and 10-by-7s. Business storage and fine art storage are two other features listed on the facility's website.

To create a customer-focused experience, Morningstar Storage accepts package deliveries for its tenants and sells packing and moving supplies. It also utilizes a state-of-the-art security system to keep its customers and their belongings safe and offers online rentals and payments for the convenience of its customers. Last but not least, Morningstar's website provides several storage-related tools to assist customers, including unit size guides with videos, a FAQs page, a packing supplies checklist, and a "Storage Insights" page with dozens of articles about various moving- and storage-related topics.

Marketing

Morningstar sought to foster strong relationships within the local community through collaborations as part of its marketing efforts, according to the company's award application. These efforts included:

- Participation in the mayor's Christmas parade in Hampden. The team rode the parade route and distributed information and candy to hundreds of people in an effort to boost excitement and awareness of the new facility in the community.
- Strategic billboard placement near the facility before its opening to advertise the facility for local residents and commuters.
- The management team engaged with the community by placing door hangers throughout the city. They also connected with local businesses and apartment complexes to generate referrals.
- The team distributed Morningstar-branded coasters to local bars and advertised on Ribaldi's Pizza



boxes to spread visibility in the neighborhood. And they provided bags at a neighborhood farmers market to support local events.

- The team connected with the Baltimore Chamber of Commerce and hosted a Maryland Business Exchange networking meeting at the facility.
- Morningstar Storage offers customers free use of its branded moving truck, which serves as a mobile billboard as well as an amenity.
- A reader board incorporated into the facility's branded monument sign is used to display fun messages and keep the community interacting with its social media posts.

- The company also has a program called Morningstar Cares. Through the program, the company encourages each of its storage facilities to donate 5 percent of its units to local nonprofit organizations for their storage and office needs.

The Union Avenue facility currently partners with the following organizations:

- Kennedy Krieger
- Restoration House Women's Charity
- The Red Cross
- Baltimore Community Food
- Saint Mary's Outreach Center
- VFW Post 2
- Rescue Mission Inc.
- Sharebaby
- Baltimore Chamber of Commerce

"These partnerships not only make a positive impact in the community but also they serve as marketing partners," Morningstar says in its award application. "By providing free storage units and access to a moving truck, we enable these organizations to do even more good for the neighborhood while increasing brand recognition."

In addition to its numerous community outreach efforts and unique marketing tactics, Morningstar Storage prominently advertises its promotional special (two months of free storage) to attract new tenants. The facility has the concession boldly displayed on a billboard along the interstate,



at an intersection, and near a busy shopping center. The company's bright blue and orange brand colors make its message highly visible to passersby.

The following are excerpts from customer reviews of the Union Avenue facility:

"These guys are new. The place was incredibly clean, the prices are fantastic, and they have some cool things I've never seen before. For one thing, you drive into the middle of the building to load and unload, meaning your move-in or out is not in the elements! They also have a van they will loan you at no charge as long as you reserve it in advance. It's a whole other level of service for that industry."—John Coulson

"Recently after losing our house to a fire, Morningstar Storage helped us in so many ways. Not only did the manager, Adam, go out of his way the day we immediately needed them by donating boxes for moving but also organized a donation of clothes and housing items for all the people affected in the weeks after! The facility itself is new, clean, and safe. It has a large area to load and unload your things and carts always available."

—Jennifer Surette ■

Jerry LaMartina is a freelance reporter and editor based in Shawnee, Kansas.

Quick Facts

Opening date: Jan. 20, 2023

Rentable square footage: 108,025

Number of units: 1,054

Occupancy as of Dec. 1, 2023: 42 percent

Owner: Morningstar Storage, a unit of Morningstar Properties of Charlotte, N.C.

Builder: Chesapeake Construction Group

Architect: Remus Architecture

Management software: SiteLink

Security system: HS Tech Group

Roof: Rosedale Roofing

Doors and interior systems: Janus International

Solar: Lumina Solar

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