

Firm's address insults East P.A.

RIGHT ZIP, WRONG CITY FOR LAWYERS' OFFICE

By **Thaai Walker**
Mercury News

Brobeck, Phleger and Harrison, a high-profile international law firm, announced the opening of its new Palo Alto offices this week. Trouble is, the offices are actually in East Palo Alto, and city officials say the firm's announcement has left them deeply offended.

Brobeck's new offices are part of the classy University Circle office complex. The development includes three office buildings clad in Italian marble, and a Four Seasons hotel is planned.

University Circle is the first high-end office space in East Palo Alto, and city officials were extremely proud when Brobeck, a firm with a strong reputation, signed on as the first tenant two years ago. For many in the struggling city, it was a sign that East Palo Alto had arrived.

But officials said Friday that they were feeling slighted after learning that Brobeck has chosen to tell the world that its of-

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fices are located in more affluent Palo Alto.

Warren Lazarow, a Brobeck partner who was the managing partner when the address decision was made, said the firm simply wants to keep the same city address it has had for the past 20 years. Before moving to University Circle, the firm was on Palo Alto's Geng Road.

"We honestly didn't think it was a big deal," Lazarow said. "We've always had a Palo Alto address, and we've continued it — there's really nothing to this."

But some law firms consider the "right" address an important part of their image, said Nicholas Gaffney, vice president of Magnet Communications in San Francisco, a national company that specializes in public relations for law firms.

"I don't think there are very many people outside the Bay Area who would be familiar with the situation between East Palo Alto and Palo Alto. But clearly, in the Bay Area, people understand that East Palo Alto is a very different place from Palo Alto — and different in a way that would be very significant to business."

Mayor Duane Bay learned the firm was listing its address as Palo Alto on Friday morning when he spotted the advertisement in a local paper.

"I'm very disappointed," he said.

Council member Pat Foster said she believed

Brobeck made its decision because of East Palo Alto's history of troubles with crime and image as a struggling community.

"When it comes to crime, everyone puts us on the front page, but when it comes to good things like this, we're denied," Foster said. "It's deceitful, and it's a put-down for the community."

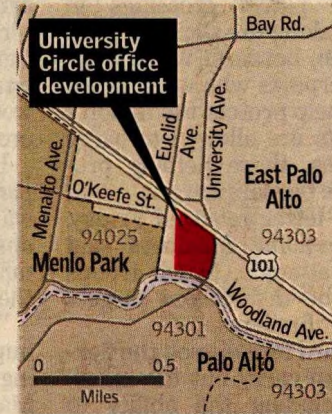
East Palo Alto, incorporated as a city in 1983, has often existed in the shadow of its more affluent neighbor. Because the two cities share part of a name and the 94303

ZIP code, the smaller, poorer city is often mistakenly thought of as an appendage to Palo Alto.

University Circle sits where East Palo Alto's former retail district, Whiskey Gulch, once stood. In 1999, the strip was declared blighted and demolished, displacing more than 100 families and 51 businesses.

Another law firm leasing three floors in University Circle — McCutchen, Doyle, Brown & Enersen — lists its address as being in East Palo Alto. Why is that?

"The easy answer is because we are in East



Palo Alto," said Mary Huser, managing partner of McCutchen. "And we're also very proud to be in East Palo Alto."

Carol Dillon, a former managing partner for McCutchen, said the "Rodeo Drive addresses of Silicon Valley" have traditionally been important accouterments. But the office space crunch of the late 1990s changed all that.

"Five years ago, there would have been a lot more talk of whether it was OK to be here," Dillon said of the East Palo Alto offices.

Huser and Dillon said the firm's new address hasn't hurt business.

"Clients don't pick big national law firms based on their street address," Dillon said. "They pick them based on the quality of legal services."

Brobeck's Lazarow said his firm did not intend to offend anyone. But it still plans to say it is in Palo Alto.

"We're not changing anything," he said. "There's a cost aspect to it. We just spent a fair amount of money printing up everything."

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