



Lead Great Park Designer Ken Smith made the design studio feel like home by painting the hallway walls a vivid orange similar to the coming Great Park balloon attraction.

SONYA SMITH, THE REGISTER

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Great Park designers moving

Ken Smith's design team prepares to move to Spectrum offices.

By SONYA SMITH
IRVINE WORLD NEWS

At first glance, building No. 83 seems like any tan building on the old El Toro base.

But a step into the vibrant orange hallway reveals the creative intensity of the Great Park Design Studio, established by lead designer Ken Smith and his team. Visiting architects, designers and artists are talking about ideas and pinning up sketches, diagrams and renderings. Each office is host to ideas, budgets and sometimes – as I found a few months ago – piles of different types of oranges picked during a tour of nearby groves.

The main room – a large, white-walled space has been personalized by Smith's team. Every other ceiling tile was removed – creating a checkerboard pattern. Models of the canyon, side views of streets and maps of the park cover every surface of the room. Designers work side by side with pencil, pen or laptop computer; sometimes gentle music fills the air. When Ken Smith is in town, the whole place crackles with creativity – especially during "pin-up sessions" when the designers share, challenge and forge new ideas.

But, not all things can last. Building No. 83 needs to be vacated within 30 days. Already, portable toilets arrived Monday because the studio's plumbing was turned off.

No one knows yet if the studio building will be demolished, or if it will be renovated. Either way, within 30 days the Great Park's creators will move to offices – likely to the Spectrum.

Design Studio CEO Ben Martin said the team has known that this area of the old base has been slated for demolition by the Lennar Corp. The area will be developed into homes, businesses and a transit hub.

Martin said the team wanted to relocate somewhere on the base, but renovating a hangar or another building would cost too much money and would take too long.

Now, the design team will pack up and figure out how to turn the new, regular offices into a hub of imagination. Sure, the team will double the current studio's 8,000 square feet, but Martin said he will miss the old place.

"It's very, very creative in here – much more so than in a conventional office," Martin said.

For more on the Great Park project, visit www.ocreger.com/greatpark.

Send tips, comments or questions for this weekly Great Park column to sosmith@ocreger.com.