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A quiet transformation downtown

Pacific Northwest Publishing is renovating a former downtown bar into an office building

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While eyes have been focused on the large office projects rising in Eugene's downtown core, a run-down building that housed a string of bars and nightclubs across Sixth Avenue from the Hilton is quietly being transformed into sleek new offices.

The local Sprick family, who own Pacific Northwest Publishing, a low-profile, homegrown publishing company, bought the 18,000-square-foot building at 21 W. Sixth Ave., for a bit more

than \$1 million. They are spending \$2 million to remodel it, and plan to move much of the company there in August, chief operations officer Matt Sprick said.

The remodel is a welcome change in the neighborhood, said Jody Hall, general manager of the Hilton Eugene & Conference Center.

“We’re very, very excited to have that building renovated and equally excited about having the Pacific Northwest Publishing folks occupying that building,” he said. “It’s a wonderful organization with a wonderful mission that they work towards, and we look forward to being good neighbors with them.”

The Sprick family’s ventures, Pacific Northwest Publishing and Safe & Civil Schools, a professional development training company focused on behavior management, have occupied offices at 2451 Willamette St., for the past six years. Now with 28 employees, the companies have outgrown that building, Matt Sprick said. So he and his parents, Randy and Marilyn, looked for additional space in other parts of town. They eventually decided to buy and renovate the Sixth Avenue building.

The Sprick family’s longtime lender, Pacific Continental Bank, is helping to finance the project, Matt Sprick said.

Pacific Northwest Publishing’s corporate offices will remain on Willamette St. The Sixth Avenue site will house additional offices, a 2,600-square-foot video-production studio and a warehouse. The publisher previously contracted with a Portland firm to do that work, but it’s now going to be doing it in-house for better quality control and customer service, Sprick said.

“We got a really good deal on the purchase” of the Sixth Avenue building, he said. “It’s a direction we might not have gone if the price hadn’t been right.”

“The fact that it was a failed nightclub and bar for such a long time probably drove the price down,” Sprick said. “Plus, (the owner, the Donald Orchard Charitable Trust) was trying to sell it right in the center of the recession.”

For a price comparable to that of industrial space in west Eugene, the publisher got commercial space “right downtown with great street visibility,” Sprick said.

The building recently housed Joe’s Bar & Grill, and Latitude 21 Bar & Grill before that. Sprick figures that many people had a hard time imagining a different use for the building, even though it was originally built in the 1960s as an auto parts warehouse with offices above, he said.

Even Sprick’s broker, Allen Ruggles, was surprised by Sprick’s request to see the building.

“(When) I asked to look at the property, our broker said, ‘Why would you want to look at that?’ ” Sprick said.

But Sprick said that he could see a second floor tucked behind a deteriorating “mesh cheese grater front.”

“The whole building was a mess,” he said. “We made sure we washed our hands well after we went in each time.”

The building was full of debris left by people who had broken in and were living there, Ruggles said.

“You could tell there (had been) a few fires,” he said. “You’d want a flashlight so you’d know where you were stepping. There were roof leaks. There was trash. You could tell the restaurant had just walked out. You could tell people had broken in to sleep upstairs.”

Sprick said he was able to look past that and imagine the space transformed into offices. And “the guts of the building were really sturdy and strong,” he said.

Architect Richard Shugar with 2fORM Architecture of Eugene has worked with the Spricks for the past year to turn the family’s vision into reality.

The building’s interior is designed to facilitate the creative, collaborative work the publisher does, Shugar said.

The video production studio is at the heart of the building, with office and meeting spaces also on the ground floor, and additional offices on the second floor.

“One of the principal themes in designing the space for them were collaboration spaces — places where people can share ideas, pin things up and work together,” Shugar said. “Spaces that are flexible. They can be enlarged or be closed down (using) sliding panels.”

The Spricks are “really amazing owners who want to design a great place for themselves and their employees, but they also want to bring (the site) back to its glory,” Shugar said.

“They’re willing to put the money into the outside as well as the inside of the building,” he said.

Come this summer, when people drive down Sixth Avenue they’ll see an attractive new building and probably won’t even remember what the other building looked like, Ruggles, the broker, said.

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