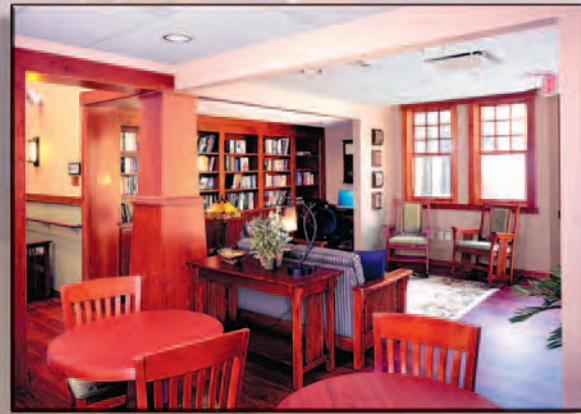




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Restoring Warmth

Renovation project updates housing for lower income individuals at Youngstown YWCA

By Diane DiPiero | Photos by Ken Krych

The YWCA has meant many things to residents of Greater Youngstown throughout the years: a site for swimming lessons, a resource for community services, a place to call home. Through a recent \$9 million restoration of the early 1911 building in Downtown Youngstown, the YWCA focuses more closely on the organization's current mission of "eliminating racism and empowering women."

Working with the architecture firm Balog, Steines, Hendricks and Manchester (BSHM), of Youngstown, and general contractor Mike Coates Construction Company, of Niles, and under the leadership of YWCA executive director Constance Shaffer, the YWCA respects its history while providing modern accommodations for women in need and updated offices for staff members who work to uphold the mission of the organization.

Housing had always been a part of the YWCA, according to Leah Brooks, development director of the organization. The restoration and renovation of

the building provided an opportunity to convert the original small rooms to one-bedroom efficiencies and apartments ranging from 450 to 750 square feet. The 30 units, which are available to women or men of low to moderate incomes, are full, and a growing waiting list testifies to the fact that the apartments fulfill a need for safe, modern housing in Downtown Youngstown.

Although a strategic plan for a repair and restoration project had been developed in the mid-1990s, it wasn't until 2007 that funding allowed for the vision to become a reality. BSHM and Mike Coates Construction came on board

for phase one of the project, which included demolishing the swimming pool and reconfiguring the apartment units. Phase two, which has just been completed, involved restoration of the main areas of the building and carving out new office spaces and an enhanced childcare area.

As with a lot of 100-year-old buildings, this one possessed a mixture of good bones and outdated features and systems. "It was an old building with a lot of little surprises," says Mary O. Dennis, senior associate architect with BSHM. "But it had great craftsmanship." Highlights of the solid construction

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SUITABLE SPACE The renovation provided an opportunity to convert rooms into one-bedroom efficiencies and apartments.

include 16-inch-thick walls and concrete flooring supporting clay tiles. Asbestos in the walls throughout the building had to be removed by a professional abater. Lead paint on the columns gracing the main lobby had to be stripped “for hours and hours,” Dennis says.

“We anticipated door and floor repair,” she adds. “Almost every door in the building was planed.” Floor repairs took longer than originally thought. “There was a different level in every room,” Dennis notes. “We had to overlay the concrete with a subfloor.”

All of the electrical work, plumbing, heating and drains to the street had to be replaced. “In places, we took out the ceiling, put in the plumbing and put the ceiling back,” says Mikes Coates, Jr. “Only the sprinklers and some fire alarms are now exposed.” A zoned sprinkler system replaced the outdated system.

Heating and cooling towers outside the building run together, and each room has its own thermostat and heat pump. That’s quite an improvement from the years when a single thermostat controlled the heating system and residents had to open their windows in the middle of winter, according to Brooks.

The real challenge for the construction team was making all of these enhancements while the building was occupied. “We had to keep heat in the building while we were demolishing old units,” says Bernie Wilkens, who served as project manager for Mike Coates



HISTORIC DETAILS Because of its historic status, the YWCA building had to maintain much of its 1911 appearance, as mandated by the Ohio Historic Preservation Office. This included original transom windows above doors, as well as a pair of fireplaces in the lobby.

Construction. This added to the project timeline, he notes, but met the YWCA’s request to not displace residents.

Because of its historic status, the YWCA building had to maintain much of its 1911 appearance, as mandated by the Ohio Historic Preservation Office. A pair of fireplaces in the lobby, original transom windows above the doors, a two-story gym and most of the doors throughout the building had to stay. “We couldn’t move corridor walls upstairs, so we had to seal up some of the former resident room doors to keep historical content,” Dennis says.

Nevertheless, the project allowed for updates that do not disturb the original integrity of the building. These include an EPDM roof, insulated-glass windows and a host of eco-friendly details like recycled carpet tiles, low-VOC paints and energy-efficient appliances in the apartments.

New offices for the 25-person YWCA staff are on two levels of the building. The first-floor Empowerment Suite

offers seven modular workstations and a number of conference rooms.

The two-story gym separates living quarters on the upper floors. The space includes a small track on the second floor where residents can walk and an open area below that can be used for a variety of activities. Each residential floor has a laundry room and an activity room.

In addition to childcare downstairs, the YWCA envisions a storefront or two that can enhance the Y’s offerings. “Maybe a startup office for a local

company and a cyber cafe to develop income stream,” Brooks says.

The exterior of the YWCA bears a grace and warmth that fits well with the organization’s mission to be a positive resource for women in the community. When the facade was cleaned, 100 years of dust – much of it a reminder of the city’s steel manufacturing past – were removed, revealing a glistening structure that has stood proudly since 1911 and plans to remain in the community for many years to come. **P**

Proud to be part of the team with Mike Coates Construction at the Youngstown YWCA

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