

Law firm replicates 1920s-era office look

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Visitors to The Law Offices of Robert Palmer, which spans the entire fifth floor of the Holland Building in downtown Springfield, might get off the elevator and think that they've stepped back in time.

In July, the firm – in conjunction with building owner and architect Allen Casey and general contractor Kenmar Construction – completed a remodeling job that was about a year in the making, said Nancy Bell, office manager for The Law Offices of Robert Palmer PC.

The finished look is circa 1920, befitting the building, which was built in 1914. The renovations cost about \$1 million, according to a permit filed

with the city of Springfield.

The Law Offices of Robert Palmer have been in the Holland Building since 1990. The firm, which has a staff of 11, including four attorneys, occupies the entire 5,260-square-foot fifth floor.

“What led to this is (that) we were just going to put in new carpeting, maybe repaint our offices ... and Mr. Casey came to us and said, ‘How would you guys like to have the whole fifth floor,’” Bell said.

There were a couple of other tenants on the fifth floor at that time, Bell said, but they were able to relocate to other floors.

Renovations to the fifth floor were completed July 5, Bell said.

The renovations retained many of the building's original features, including the inch-thick marble corridor

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The new conference room



Attorney Robert Palmer's new office



Office Manager Nancy Bell in a marble-walled corridor

1920s

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walls. For the office walls and most of the ceilings, plaster was used to keep with the historical look, Bell said. Many of the items, such as light fixtures, aren't original, but they are replicas of 1920s items.

Also, the original tile is still on the floors, and most of the woodwork, which was stained and refinished, is original to the

building.

At some point in the history of the Holland Building, lowered ceilings were put in, Bell said, likely to compete with newer buildings. But when those ceilings were taken out during the remodeling process, transom windows were uncovered.

"When they re-exposed the transom windows, which were all original, they were all there; we did have to replace some of the glass, because they'd been broken through the years," Bell said.

The lowered ceiling was retained in the firm's general work room for economy's sake, Bell said.

For help with the interior design concept, the law firm turned to Mount Vernon native Jennifer Robison of Kansas City-based Dumas Designs.

Reminiscent features

Research was the key to finding appropriate décor for the firm's 1920s look.

"You can do research to find out what

color combinations and what types of color were popular in different design periods, and so I just researched what colors were popular at the turn of the century," Robison said.

The color scheme features shades of pink, green and blue, and uses the natural wood paneling and the refinished woodwork.

This was Robison's first job involving design from a historical aspect, and she said it wasn't without challenges.

"One of my biggest challenges was finding carpeting and fabrics that were in keeping with the style of the time without being too busy or too much of an outdat-

The renovation is 'a classic example of what you can have in these downtown buildings.'

Allen Casey
The Casey Associates Inc.

ed look. So I tried to find patterns that kind of reflected the time period ... but have sort of a modern feel," Robison said.

She found a fabric collection from a manufacturer that represented the desired time period, she said, and that fabric was used for the seating in the reception area and in Palmer's office.

The carpet is patterned – and gold.

"The color and the pattern ended up blending pretty well with the finishes and furnishings that we selected," Robison said.

Casey said tenants can choose their own interior décor for their spaces.

"Some of the tenants haven't changed their interior finishes but very well might before too long," Casey said.

As for The Law Offices of Robert Palmer, Casey said, "They're just wonderful, enthusiastic tenants, and I do think ... it's a classic example of what you can have in these downtown buildings."

Building updates

Whether other tenants will follow suit with remodeling, Casey said, the entire building has benefited from remodeling and restoration in the corridors and on the woodwork. Other changes also include accommodations for temperature control and technology.

In contemporary buildings, Casey said, he often sees an exterior that looks nice paired with an interior that is fairly standard.

"But in a building like the Holland Building, in a historic building, you get the



Allen Casey

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Holland Building

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chance for the nicer treatment in the corridors. ... The Holland building has the marble walls and the historic ceramic tile floors, and we had the opportunity for the great mahogany finish on all the wood trim, crown molding, floor molding and what-not throughout the individual office spaces," Casey said.

The building's wood windows are all operable, Casey said, which is unusual. However, the glass in the windows was replaced with energy-efficient insulated

glass. Many of the fixtures, such as those in the restrooms, are restored, and the light fixtures are more high-character than contemporary, he added. The building also boasts decorative iron railings.

"But at the same time, we've actually brought fiber optic, high-speed Internet into the Holland Building ... so as far as the technology available, it's the best available anywhere," Casey said.

Other updates include central air conditioning and new valves with thermostats in the radiators, which provide water heating for the building.

"Through that, we've got not only the cooling, but each of those new units actu-

ally also has a small heat pump in it, so each office can also get a modest amount of heat through the new system so that they don't have to use the radiator heating until it gets quite a bit colder," Casey said.

Each office space has a separate control for the heating and cooling.

While the second through fifth floors are essentially full, Casey said he's still searching for a retail tenant to occupy about 3,000 square feet on the first floor, which also will house Riad, a Greek restaurant.

Also on the first floor, Casey said, there will be a 600-square-foot space adjacent to Riad's that can be used for meetings and private.

"That will also be available to tenants in

the building, as well as other people downtown. It'll have the high-speed Internet in there, and it'll be very nicely finished It'll seat up to about 30, so people, if they wanted, could utilize the neighboring restaurant and bar service ... or just have meetings down there," Casey said.

Casey also said he would very much like to see an Irish pub go into the basement of the Holland Building.

Casey did note that although there's no office space available in the Holland Building, similar office space will eventually be available in another of his downtown projects, the Sterling Hotel. Façade work has started and interior work will follow.