

SPRINGFIELD NEWS-SUN



Renovated Bushnell Building may be tipping point for downtown

By [Kelly Mori](#), Staff Writer

Updated 3:44 PM Monday, December 13, 2010

SPRINGFIELD — The exterior of the Bushnell Building tells the story of Springfield's influence and glamour during the 1890s. Owner Jim Lagos hopes the interior of the 117-year-old building will soon tell the story of the city's 21st-century rebirth.

The building, at 14 E. Main St., is nearing the end of a \$10 million renovation that will convert 75,000-square-feet of the building's 176,000-square-feet into office space. Much of the space will be the new home of CodeBlue, the Wisconsin-based water mitigation company that recently brought its claims-service business to Springfield.

The building had no tenants when Lagos purchased it in 1993. CodeBlue will bring about 300 workers to the building, with potential to add more. The company is leasing space in the Credit Life building during the renovation. It has 70 employees and is adding about a dozen at a time as new hires take the training program at Clark State Community College.

CodeBlue expects to reach its 300-employee goal in 18 months. That's not the only business adding jobs downtown. The city's downtown hospital will open in a year, bringing thousands of employees. Ohio Valley Medical Center, 100 W. Main, added 125 workers when it opened its downtown hospital last year.

Thousands of new professionals are bound to spur additional urban development, said Maureen Fagans, Center City Association executive director. She is already seeing changes.

Fagans said requests for retail space have improved compared to last year. She also is getting calls about downtown apartment space.

"Downtown Springfield is at a tipping point right now," she said.

The pairing of CodeBlue with the Bushnell Building was a perfect marriage of ideals, said CodeBlue CEO Paul Gross. He shares Lagos' view on investing in the urban core.

"I think it's wasteful to build a new property off the interstate when we have such great infrastructure in the heart of downtown," Gross said.

The \$5 million Jobs Ready Site Grant, which Lagos matched, required minimum environmental features, said Springfield Economic Development Administrator Tom Franzen. Lagos decided to pursue the higher LEEDS Platinum rating.

"This will be a point of pride," Franzen said. "It is truly a demonstration project for the whole

country for how turn-of-the-century projects can meet those requirements.”

Soy-based thick insulation and expansive natural lighting are two energy-conserving features of the project, Lagos said. Lagos is optimistic about the growth potential — so much so that’s he’s preparing the floors above and below CodeBlue for additional office space. “We’re preparing lots and lots of room,” he said. “It will easily house 300. I’m hoping for 1,000.”

The renovations were to be complete by January, but the project will be delayed slightly due to the extra time spent with historic preservation officials, Lagos said.

Historic landmark

It’s probably no surprise that thousands of people come to Springfield annually to visit Frank Lloyd Wright’s Westcott House. But it’s not the city’s only architectural gem.

“I have met people from Chicago who have traveled all the way to Springfield just to take a picture of the Bushnell Building,” said Springfield historian Kevin Rose.

While it stands alone in Springfield, the Bushnell Building has a near twin — Boston’s first skyscraper — The Ames Building. The Art Institute in Chicago and the Chicago Public Library were also designed by the same architectural firm. The buildings were among the first in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, created by Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge, successors to H. H. Richardson.

The style was controversial at the time. Its place in history is what brings people here, Rose said.

The Bushnell Building is also a symbol of Springfield’s influence in that era.

“The year 1893 was big for Springfield when it came to building a lot of what would become the downtown,” he said. “If we lost Bushnell and Warder Library (another Shipley, Rutan and Coolidge design) we would lose a picture of Springfield when it was at its height of influence and glamour.”

History was also made inside the building.

The Wright Brothers obtained their patent for the airplane from patent attorney Harry Toulmin, whose office was on one of the upper floors. In 17 years, Toulmin created five patents for the brothers.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if Orville and Wilbur spent a lot of time in that building,” he said.

Rose said CodeBlue will be a boon for the building. “What goes on inside will mean a lot to our economy,” he said. “But what some people don’t realize is what is on the outside of that building means a lot to our economy as well.”

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