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Strong foundation

Wean opens doors to new downtown Warren headquarters

July 18, 2012

By RAYMOND L. SMITH - reporter (rsmith@tribtoday.com) , Tribune Chronicle | TribToday.com

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Gordon Wean walks around the new Raymond John Wean building with both a sense of pride of his family's history in Trumbull County and a sense of how helping neighborhoods through philanthropic activities will build their futures.

While the more than \$2.5 million dollar downtown complex officially opened June 1, for the foundation and its tenants, an invitation-only grand opening will be held today.

Public tours are available by appointment by calling 330-394-5600.

Article Photos



Tribune Chronicle / Raymond L. Smith

"We were looking for a building for several years," Wean said. "The layout and the size of this building was just right, and the timing was right."

Working with the Chesler Group out of Cleveland, the building at 147 W. Market St. was gutted and an historically accurate renovation was performed. It is now on the National Register of Historic Buildings.

The 17,000-square-foot Market Block Building was built in the 1860s and was divided into three different facilities.

The two-story building has basement offices, conference rooms for

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nonprofits, the Wean Foundation's new headquarters and room for new businesses to form, develop and grow.

Within the building are photographs and paintings from the Wean Co., as well as paintings on loan from the Butler Institute of American Art.

"The leaders of the Butler were very generous to allow us to use some of the paintings that they do not currently have on display on long-term loans," Wean said.

Michael Chesler, owner of the Chesler Group, said they were careful to maintain the historic nature of the structure, while doing the necessary work to make it a facility with all of the necessary, state-of-the-art equipment.

That isn't to say the building's past was not honored.

Its windows were made to the exact specifications of the original ones. Some doors that were found in the walls were restored, and some of the stone walls on the basement level were restored and sealed.

"Some of the 2-by-6 inch ceiling joists were so hard that we burned through a new saw blade to get a single cut," Chesler said. "The wood was like cutting through steel."

"In doing this renovation, we used about 75 percent local contractors and residents," Chesler said. "We believe it is important if we are going to do work in the city we should hire people living and working here."

The renovation took 10 months.

Founded in 1949 by rolled steel-maker and industrialist Raymond John Wean, the foundation has made more than \$90 million in grants to a broad base of organizations.

It continued under Wean and later his wife, Sara, through the mid-1980s. Their son, Raymond John Wean Jr., led the foundation until his death in 2006.

Gordon Wean, the third generation of the family, is now chairman of the foundation.

"We hope to be a catalyst for the revitalization of downtown Warren," Wean said. "Downtowns should be the vibrant and vital places for communities. I know that downtown Warren was that kind of place when I was growing up."

Wean said part of the consideration to move into Market Block Building is that he believes that cities like Youngstown and Warren have historic older buildings that can be restored, become useful to their communities and maintain the historic feel of the neighborhoods.

"It is the way we like doing things," he said. "We hope to spark investment in the downtown area."

City Councilman Greg Bartholomew expressed surprise at how quickly the building's renovation took place, but is pleased with the results.

"I'm surprised how quickly they got this done, because it was in such disarray when they first started," he said. "It is beautiful and pristine. Hopefully, it can be part of the process of drawing people to downtown."

Now, Bartholomew said he also would like to see more established retail businesses move downtown.

Part of the future of the Wean Foundation is to be an incubator for new businesses and to work with neighborhood organizations and groups to improve their areas.

"We believe the people who know the neighborhoods best are those who live and work in them," Wean said. "So we work with them in developing ideas and provide them with resources to achieve their visions."

Matt Martin, the director of Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership, which was formed by the Wean Foundation and is now housed in its new

building, says the expansion came just in time.

"They are opening this building at the same time we are expanding the number of employees," Martin said.

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