

'Cool factor' of Carlisle impresses future tenants



The renovation of the Carlisle Building, which was set on fire in April 2003, is down to the final touches. Adena Health Systems will be using the site for offices and housing for medical residents. Jona Ison/Chillicothe Gazette



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Medical students get first glimpse of what will soon be their living quarters



(Photo: Jona Ison/Chillicothe Gazette)

CHILLICOTHE – Gabrielle Pugliese couldn't stop smiling Tuesday as she got her first glimpse of the place she'll call home starting in November.

"It's fantastic," said the medical student from the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine. "It's a difficult undertaking to take a really old building that was gutted and make it something that's really impressive on the inside."

Pugliese joined fellow students Alex Harmony, Nicholas Elwert, Sara Hromadka and Thu Hoang on Tuesday's tour of the Carlisle Building, which will become their temporary home rent-free through their participation in Adena Health System's residency program. For all five, it was their first glimpse of the restored building that developer Michael Chesler said is roughly about two weeks from what he would consider complete.

The response from all five — particularly after walking through a furnished corner unit on the third floor with a bank of windows facing both Paint and Main streets letting in abundant natural light — was very enthusiastic.

"Seeing the outside of the building, I wasn't quite expecting such a modern, rustic interior, but they've definitely married it very well," Pugliese said.

According to Adena, 15 of the apartments in the building will initially be occupied by medical students, with three additional units to be used on a rental basis and one being held over for recruitment purposes. All told, there are 32 units – 12 studio apartments and 20 apartments — that will eventually be utilized.

The units feature hardwood floors, glass shower doors, black quartz, rock maple cabinetry and nickel-plated hardware. The intent, Chesler said, was to provide the building's tenant, Adena, with an interior that would impress the very people the health system hopes to have stay and practice in Chillicothe following their educational program's completion.

Chesler also said that part of the renovation involved making sure the building would never again fall victim to the type of fire that badly damaged the late 19th century structure in 2003 and resulted in it sitting vacant for more than a decade.

"The building now has a full, automatic fire suppression system," Chesler said. "It's got more bells and whistles on it than any building in town, I heard the inspector telling me that. It would be very hard for the building to go to a fire again."

The developer noted that the intended residents of the building are the perfect fit for what was done with it because he has discovered through interacting with twenty-somethings that the blend of historic features with modern amenities has a certain "cool" factor they seem to enjoy. The students' reaction to a third-floor sitting area that for the most part will be left alone — scorch marks on the brick and all — as a testament to what happened there, demonstrated that he is right in that assessment.

"People pay a lot of money to get this look, and all we had to do was leave it alone," Chesler said of the sitting area.

"It's beautiful. I love the historic nature of it," Elwert said of the building. "It's the perfect blend between the history and the new, modern studio and apartment, it's the perfect blend."

"I love it, it's gorgeous," said Hromadka, a North Carolina native. "It has a lot of character to it, which I like with the old and the newness. We really value now the historic aspect, but then again, they did a really good job of making everything like new so it doesn't feel old."

For a lot of people who engage in long-term projects, the vision at the beginning of the work often undergoes several changes before the end of the project is reached. Chesler said that's never been the case for him.

"I knew exactly how it was going to turn out," he said. "That's my weird talent is I can see (what I want), and through controlling construction, I make it continue to be exactly how I want it to be. If you do the drawings, the drawings are representative, but you can't get the feel of it — there's a thousand things that aren't on the drawings that we tweak so it looks just right."

Chesler pointed to an element on the door framing of one of the units of an example of one of the "little things" that are tweaked to make an elegant and historically accurate final product.

Even though the soon-to-be final product matches his vision for the building, the developer said the final tours are among his least favorite part of a project because he notices little imperfections that most other people wouldn't see.

The CEO of the building's tenant, who along with Chief Medical Officer Dr. John Fortney will be moving their offices into the first floor of the restored building, certainly didn't see any imperfections.

"It's turned out great," said Shuter, whom Chesler has credited for getting the ball rolling for the renovation by bringing Adena on board for the project. "It was in such bad shape, it was kind of hard to envision (the final product)."

The \$8 million renovation project was the first to receive a JobsOhio loan and also enjoyed support in the form of loans and grants from Cortland Banks, the City of Chillicothe, Chillicothe Ross Community Foundation and Ross County Community Improvement Corp. The Ross County Community Foundation Tuesday afternoon presented Chesler and Shuter with a check toward their final installment loan for the project.

Community celebration

Adena Health System, which will assume the lease and become caretaker of the Carlisle Building once the roughly 16 months of construction work is completed, is planning a community celebration and official ribbon cutting for the project at noon Oct. 19 at the corner of Paint and Main streets. The event will feature both local and state-level speakers who played a role in the renovation.

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