

# BUSINESS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2007 | SECTION C

THE PLAIN DEALER

A Prospect Avenue home began as the grand manor of a bank president. It has also housed widows, accountants and fraternity brothers. After an 18-month rejuvenation, it is the office of Laborers Local 860, whose meeting hall is inside the restored porch.

## 127 years old and looks new

Local 860  
now inhabits  
19th-century  
restored mansion

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*Plain Dealer Reporter*

The hard-hatted laborers on highway and sewer projects don't exactly evoke images of ornate parlors and enormous carriage houses.

You might expect their union headquarters to be more on the order of a cinder-block hall with fluorescent lights, furnished with lots of folding tables and chairs.

It was just such a building near downtown Cleveland that served as the administrative hub for Laborers Local 860 for a half-century. But the industrial garage at Prospect and Carnegie avenues was cramped and outdated, so the 2,200-member union started looking for new offices.

The hunt led to one unusual marriage of form and function for organized labor.

In October, Local 860 moved into a fancy manor on Prospect Avenue, a relic from the aristocratic quarter near downtown Cleveland that John D. Rockefeller and other industrial barons once called home.

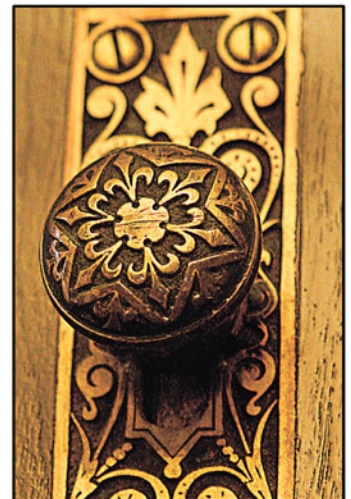
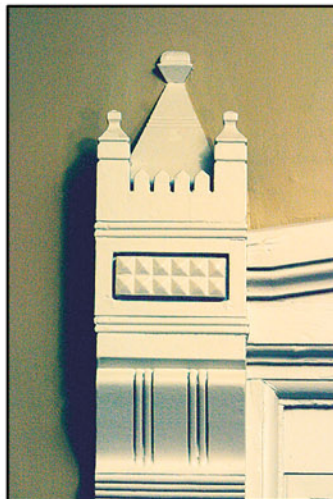
The move came after an 18-month project to return the building to its once opulent grandeur, down to the leafy designs in ceiling plaster and door moldings milled to match the few that had survived.

SEE RESTORE | C5



GUS CHAN | THE PLAIN DEALER

Anthony Liberatore Jr., business manager of Laborers Local 860, in the doorway of Southworth House, says the mansion had a "quiet dignity."



PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM RIETER | SPECIAL TO THE PLAIN DEALER

Brass doorknobs, carved door moldings and other details of the Southworth House survive.



## BEFORE



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## AFTER



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## RESTORE

FROM C1

### Laborers inhabit stately mansion

Business Manager Anthony Liberatore Jr. said Local 860 is probably the only union in America with headquarters in a 19th-century mansion.

When Liberatore first looked inside the building, it showed years of neglect. It had passed through many hands over 127 years, including a few decades as party central for a fraternity from Cleveland State University. The top floor had a flock of pigeons.

But important details survived, including a gracious grand staircase, plaster ceiling medallions, mahogany fireplaces and decorative woodwork. The place had a “quiet dignity,” and the idea of restoring it was more appealing

than building a new union hall from the ground up, Liberatore said.

The union negotiated to buy the house from developer Michael Chesler, who had already started a historic renovation of the property, led by architects Scott and Analia Dimit. The Dimit team stayed on the project.

The biggest challenge was working within federal guidelines for historic preservation while updating the house to provide first-class office space, Scott Dimit said. The work had to follow strict rules to qualify for historic tax credits.

A porch was merged with four adjacent rooms to become the union’s new meeting hall. Bedrooms and parlors became administrative offices. The carriage house turned into a training center.

Frank Rini and Jay Reeths of Rinello Construction oversaw the reconstruction.

One dramatic moment came

when the contractors learned that a pair of missing mahogany doors were at a local antique house ready to be sold.

“We rushed there,” Reeths said. “They are irreplaceable.”

In an odd twist, Liberatore said, Local 860 laborers who laid the concrete for the Euclid Avenue Corridor are now headquartered in the mansion of the businessman who laid Euclid Avenue’s original pavement. He was William Palmer Southworth, a 19th-century president of National City Bank.

W.P., as he was known, prospered after moving to Cleveland in 1836 at age 17, making his money in grocery sales and construction. When Southworth and his wife, Louisa, looked for a place to build a family home, they settled on a vacant lot on Prospect Avenue.

Prospect had become Cleveland’s second most prestigious address after Millionaire’s Row on Euclid Avenue, according to a

history of the Southworth House compiled for the union. The Southworths built in the Italianate style of medieval villas then gripping the imagination of American architects who had traveled in Italy.

Local 860 spared no expense, Dimit said. Craftsmen carefully copied remaining wood and plaster architectural figments to recover as much of the building’s original character as possible. Liberatore said acquisition and renovation costs totaled \$2.5 million. Kathleen Crowther, executive director of the Cleveland Restoration Society, described the project as being “at the cutting edge of smart everything.”

“By selecting an existing building and making it like new, they created more jobs than new construction, and they were being green and sustainable at the same time,” she said.

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GUS CHAN | PLAIN DEALER

The refurbished front entry of the 1880 Southworth House in Cleveland, which is now home to Laborers Local 860.

## Southworth House time line

**1836:** Connecticut native William Palmer Southworth arrives in Cleveland. He prospers in grocery sales and street construction.

**1870:** Southworth wins a seat on the board of National City Bank. Three years later, he's elected National City president.

**1879:** Southworth and his wife, Louisa, begin building their manor and move in a year later.

**1891:** Southworth dies. Four years later, Louisa expands the home to 19 rooms and adds a three-story brick carriage house. An active suffragist, she

often entertains Susan B. Anthony at the home.

**1907:** The Southworth children sell the property to the Baptist Church. With matching funds from John D. Rockefeller, it becomes a home for poor Baptist widows.

**1920:** The Baptists sell the house and move. The new owners carve the property into offices for accountants, engineers and other professionals. Over the next 50 years, the manor, known as the Edlmar Building and later the Accountants Building, is bought and sold

many times.

**1973:** Pi Sigma Tau fraternity buys the house and turns it into a party house for more than two decades, even installing a basement rathskeller bar.

**1984:** Southworth is placed on National Register of Historic Places.

**1996:** Pi Sigma Tau sells the house to Cleveland developer Michael Chesler.

**1997:** Chesler sells the house to a Bratenahl businesswoman, who operates a home health-care company in it. She later pleads guilty to fraud for lying

to secure bank loans and defrauding Medicaid. She defaults on the mortgage.

**2005:** The house is sold at a sheriff's auction to Chesler, who again takes possession.

**2006:** Chesler and Anthony Liberatore, business manager of Laborers Local 860, strike a deal for the union to buy Southworth.

**October 2007:** Local 860 moves into its new headquarters.

SOURCE: "Southworth House," a brochure compiled for Laborers Local 860.