

Owner of Times Building brings back historic look

By Bryan Schutt, Times Staff Writer

Monday, November 03, 2008

Main Street in Westminster has had a dynamic history and Matt Litfin is doing his best to bring back the past.

Litfin's company, Red Maple Properties bought the Times Building on 63 E. Main St. in Westminster in August 2006 and admittedly had no idea what he was about to get into. In his mind, it was a sound investment in commercial real estate, and that alone made it worth purchasing.



But then he started renovating. And now, more than two years later, residents tell Litfin the Times Building looks better than it has for decades.

Though most of the building has been a standard drywall, spackle and paint fix-up, the hallway of the building now brings back visions of the early 20th century because of his renovations.

And now he takes pride in bringing back a historic flare to Westminster.

"I don't think I appreciated the history of the building until I bought the building and started bringing it back," Litfin said. "This building, for years, was just something you walked by."

After taking out wooden panels, Litfin and the contractor he hired to renovate found ornate tin walls hidden underneath. The discovery baffled Litfin, because he didn't even know what exactly he was dealing with.

"I'm 45 and never seen ornate tin walls in my life," Litfin said. "Most of the panels were removed literally one nail at a time, then bent back into place and put back on the wall."

"It was worth every penny to bring out the historic feel though. You couldn't buy [the tin walls] today if you wanted to and that's why I decided to preserve it."

Using what he could learn about the early 1900's architecture and design, he fit and molded the tin walls and ceiling back to its original style, then painted them copper and gold. He also added pendant hanging lights consistent with the time frame.

The Times Printing Co., was founded in 1911 and its office was what is now the first floor hallway of the Times Building, Litfin said. In 1956, the company became the Carroll County Times.

And the outside of the building got some T.L.C. as well. The storefront was renovated and new awnings were added after working with Westminster's Administrator of Economic Development Stan Ruchlewicz.

Ruchlewicz said he was enthused with Litfin's interest of preserving history.

"He tried his best ... to keep the interest of downtown at heart," Ruchlewicz said. "Image is everything [downtown]. For someone to take pride in their property is excellent."

Litfin said although he's an analytical kind of guy, bringing the art and spirit back to the Times Building has brought him a lot of satisfaction. He hopes other business owners around Main Street keep rejuvenating the area.

"[Md.] 140 has a certain flow and historic Main Street does too," Litfin said. "It's a living atmosphere. The way to draw [people] back is through architecture and design."

Litfin's mission was making his piece of downtown as nice as he could. By adding Wine Me Up and Hidden Pearl and having a few other renovated offices for lease, he thinks his building is going in the right direction.

"Main Street needs that right direction to go," Litfin said. "It needs to have a retail flare to keep the economy going."

Reach staff writer Bryan Schutt at 410-857-7886 or bryan.schutt@carrollcountytimes.com.