

looking to the future

by preserving the past



When the owners of Kingsway Realty decided to move from their small and not-so-convenient location in Akron, they knew they would have to spend some money. Whether they built new, purchased an existing office building, or rented—all of which were thoroughly explored—they knew that they were in for a sizable expense. After all, these were real estate people and who better knows the value of property, especially property with great location?

For them, location meant visibility and easy access and they wanted to stay in the Ephrata area. Despite months of extensive searching, nothing surfaced that they could get excited about.

That all changed when one of the group's members casually inquired about a residential listing that they had in their inventory—an historic stone farmhouse located just off Route 272 near the 28th Division Highway (Route 322) interchange. In addition to its high-traffic, high-visibility location, the property was also commercially zoned.

Why this property flew under their radar for so long is a mystery—perhaps the solution to their problem was just too obvious. Or maybe it wasn't considered seriously because of the work (not to mention the expense) that would be required to transform a neglected 18th-century mansion into a modern hi-tech office building.

The more they thought about the farmhouse—its historical significance, its potential presence, and its incredible location—their excitement only grew. A partnership was formed— 830 Associates—who purchased the building and would invest in the capital improvements to bring this dream into a reality. Despite their euphoria, they were well aware of the financial commitment they

were about to make. Renovations can be expensive and renovating a home of this vintage would certainly be even more so. In addition to getting it up to today's building codes and standards, there was no telling what additional surprises (and costs) were ahead of them. Older construction always has its surprises...and this was one of the areas oldest.

SPOTLIGHT

project description

Type:	Major renovation and addition.
Contractor:	Middle Creek Builders Inc. (see ad on p. 31)
Trade Partners:	Bernell Burkholder LLC, Building & Remodeling (see ad p. 32) Eby Exteriors, Inc.(see ad p. 32) Good Painting (see ad p. 36) Gundrum's Electric (see ad p. 36) Musselman Lumber Inc. (see ad p. 35) Pike's Paint & Wallpaper Store (see ad p. 36)
Scope:	<p>This project was a renovation to a mid 1700's-era, stone, residential farm property. The goal was to convert the property into a functional office building while maintaining its original style and architecture. The property consisted of a 6,000 square-foot home as well as a detached two-story smokehouse and an existing hand dug well. It was a two-story structure with original wood plank flooring throughout and thick stone walls with deep window sills and five indoor fireplaces one of which was a walk-in fireplace.</p> <p>The entire renovation was to be completed while maintaining the original wood flooring. An additional challenge was that the original volume of renovation nearly doubled as changes were made throughout the project. Despite the volume increase and working during the winter months with ice and snow hindering exterior work, the project was finished on the scheduled completion date.</p> <p>All the single pane, wooden sashes were replaced with new windows. Existing plaster walls were repaired, patched, and painted. Remodeling consisted of two 2nd floor bathrooms, adding a new 1st floor bathroom, kitchenette, 26 offices, two conference rooms, a reception area, and a new courtyard entry. The existing attic space consisted of 2,000 square feet. Blown insulation was installed in the cavity space between the 2nd floor ceiling and the attic floor boards. HVAC units were placed in the attic and basement. The entire building was completely rewired and an interconnected data system was installed.</p> <p>The exterior of the smokehouse was renovated as well in keeping with the 1700's style. The roofing and windows were replaced.</p> <p>The existing hand dug well was saved. This was located in the new courtyard area. This was an attractive feature due to the shallow depth of the water table. The stone wall sides were raised and capped with slate. Low voltage lighting was installed in the well for night time viewing. Clean river stones were placed on the bottom.</p> <p>Although this renovation had some challenges, it was a fun, rewarding project. It was interesting to uncover 1700's style building materials and methods of construction.</p>



One thing they all agreed to from the outset, however, was that no matter what surprises were ahead of them, they were committed to doing the project right.

Thinking local (and keeping it that way), the group employed Ephrata-based builder, Darryl Bollinger, President

of Middle Creek Builders, to coordinate the renovations. A long-running, family-owned company with a stellar reputation, Middle Creek Builders was well known to the group and had a well established level of trust.

Middle Creek Builders was founded in 1974 by Walter Bollinger, with sons

Darryl joining the company in 1984 and Duane ten years later. Today, Duane serves as the company's Secretary/Treasurer, while Walter has assumed the role of Vice President. In day-to-day operations, however, Duane serves as a project manager and did so for this project. Due to the complexities associated with such an older

structure and a very tight construction schedule, Walter with his vast experience assumed daily on-site oversight and troubleshooting duties.

To learn more about the project, we sat down with Darryl and two of the four owners of 830 Associates, Carol Musser and Roger Kline. Here's what we found out.

What can you tell us about your decision to go with Middle Creek Builders?

Roger: All of us knew Darryl, his father and the company. Although we knew many local builders who do this kind of work, we narrowed it down to two to give us a feel for what needed to be done and how we were going to get there.

Before we even talked with the prospective builders, the four owners made a pact that if we're going to do this—we were going to do it right, no matter what it takes.

That kind of makes it sound like Middle Creek Builders were expensive and, despite that, you chose them anyway?

Roger [amid laughter]: No, no...Middle Creek's pricing was fair...very fair. We chose them based on their great reputation and our firsthand knowledge of how they are to work with. Our experience over the years is that there are no other guys easier to work with.

Carol: I did the interviewing and what impressed me about Darryl during the initial walkthrough was his thoroughness and vision for seeing beyond things. He was the only one who actually pulled down part of a suspect ceiling to inspect what we were dealing with. I was impressed with his observations and ideas and I respected his willingness to point out potential issues upfront rather than postponing them until after he got the contract. He gained my trust immediately.

Another thing that made Middle Creek stand out in my mind was that I got the feeling that they are going to be more proactive about how to do things right.

830 MARTIN AVENUE, EPHRATA

a condensed history



As is documented by the paired datestones on the second floor facade level, this sandstone house was built for John and Margaret Miller in 1777. The rear or kitchen wing may be an early addition, in total or in part. The two-story frame addition to the north of the facade is believed to date c.1830.

This house is an excellent example of the adoption of the English Georgian style by prosperous Germans in Lancaster County at the time of the Revolution. There is no finer cut sandstone facade from the 1700s extant in Lancaster County; the keystones over the nine facade windows and the central doorway are notable. The interior retains some important interior woodwork including a fine built-in wardrobe, a molded mantel shelf in the south front room on the first floor, an open staircase with an unusual panelled soffit, panelled dados, moldings and doors. Most likely, the facade originally possessed neither entry porch nor piazza.

Source: Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County

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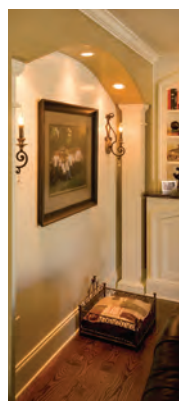


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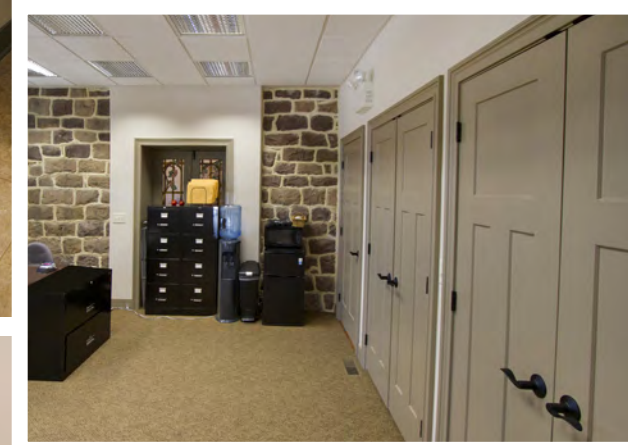
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It was important to us to maintain the home's original style and architectural features—keeping the original looks while blending it into a highly functional modern workspace. I could tell Darryl had prior experience with older homes and he gave me confidence that he'd be acting in our best interest.

Another big selling point was Darryl's plan to have a project manager on site to answer questions and keep things moving among the various subcontractors. As it turned out, those duties were assigned to Darryl's brother, Duane who was assisted by the patriarch of the family, Walter. Their daily presence and direction was huge!



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During the construction phase, I was here almost daily, sometimes multiple trips a day, and there were few times that I wasn't asked about something. Most likely, that kind of interaction would not have taken place without Walter and Duane being on-site and being on top of things with the subcontractors. I feel this level of involvement was a major reason why things were not overlooked and details, even the small ones, were addressed right then and there. I liked it that our interactions were so open and friendly. It seemed like a real team effort.

What sort of structural changes were incorporated into the plans?

Roger: We had a local architect who had done some work for the previous owner help us with



the front porch. At the time we purchased the property, there was just a very small roof over the front door. With the help of some old photos, the architect came up with a plan to restore the front porch roof to its original size.

Carol: Other areas that were addressed in the plans included a new courtyard entry as well as the conversion of the restrooms to meet ADA guidelines making them wheelchair accessible.

How well did Middle Creek Builders do in preparing you for what to expect during the construction phase?

Carol: I've had some experience in new residential construction and I can't say enough good things about the job Darryl and his team did in preparing us for the job as well as how he handled things as the project proceeded. He far exceeded everything in terms of what I was used to.

Keep in mind that this was by no means a plain vanilla job. With the age of this home, you just weren't sure what you were going to run into. There were issues constantly coming up that needed to be addressed right then and there. Regardless of the issue—and there were many—Darryl was always there with options and a suggestion. He was excellent.

This project had an extremely tight timetable which must have created all kinds of challenges in getting issues resolved quickly and coordinating work among the various trade partners. Why such a tight time frame and how did Middle Creek do completing the project on time?

Roger: The Akron office from which we were moving was a rental and our lease was expiring in

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March. Basically, we were in the same pickle as most buyers—we had to give notice. In our case, we decided not to extend our rental agreement. Instead, we included an accelerated construction schedule in our project specifications—and Middle Creek Builders accepted the challenge.

Carol: I became very good friends with Darryl and his team during those three months—we saw a lot of each other. As the designated contact person for the owners, I made a point of making myself accessible including weekends so that no one would lose any time waiting on decisions to be made. Middle Creek was doing everything humanly possible to keep things on schedule and I didn't want us to be the cause of any hold up.

Darryl: Sometimes there are just too many heads involved and that can impact decision making and slow things down. But this situation was just great. The owners worked well together and decisions were made quickly. From a builder's perspective, this was an ideal situation.

Much has been said about surprises... what were some of them?

Carol: The extra bracing that we put in the attic area for one. New roofing had been installed on the front by the former owner, so we decided to complete the job on the back. While in the attic inspecting things, Darryl pointed out the roof was sagging and suggested that we fix it by shoring up the entire roofing system with braces.

Darryl: It only made sense. The roof was already sagging and I thought we'd better address it rather than let it become a bigger issue down the road.

Roger: Another thing that comes to mind is the retention pond that we put in as kind of an afterthought. Although the project took place during the cold of the winter, I started having these nagging concerns about rain water. We had the new spouting completed but with the area's high water table, I felt we'd better get the run-off channeled away from the building. This made sense to the group so we had Darryl make arrangements for some excavation work on the south side of the property to serve as a water retention area. In retrospect, we're glad we did it...

the building is staying dry and during heavy rains the retention pond fills up quickly.

Carol: These types of things seemed to happen all the time. Something would surface overnight and we'd have it resolved the next morning. It was like..."okay what do we do next?"

Roger: And yet, it was never a problem for Darryl. He always took things in stride and always had a good solution for us.

How were your dealings with Middle Creek's trade partners?

Carol: Despite all we threw at them—and it was a lot in a very short period of time—they were all incredibly responsive. As the project developed, I kept coming up with ideas that would stray a bit from the initial plans—asking "can we do this, can we do that?" The electrician, Curt Gundrum of Gundrum's Electric, and the painter, Kevin Good of Good Painting, were especially accommodating.

Another company that I'd like to single out is Pike's Paint and Wallpaper Store. Gary Pike was extremely helpful in coordinating the paint color scheme for the entire project. His suggestions reflected those typical for a stone home built during that time period. The final product is not only reminiscent of the past but provides a clean, distinct color palette that is very pleasing to the eye.

Working on an older home is no doubt more challenging than something built more recently, but this older home is REALLY old. What kind of challenges did this 18th century landmark present?

Darryl: With older homes, the biggest challenges are the unknowns—you just never know what you're going to run into. Back when this place was built, there were no building codes and no standard building practices. I'm not implying that the house was poorly built—on the contrary. But when you open up a wall on a home this old, you just never know what you'll find.

For example, Curt Gundrum, the electrician, had one of the most challenging





jobs on this project. He was required to install thousands of feet of wire and data cable lines through the existing plaster walls and ceilings.

Roger: Curt is very good at this type of work. His handiwork allowed us to retain the original plaster walls.

Carol: In working with Curt, the pressure for me was finalizing the items we needed now but also thinking about the future needs. In addition to the private offices, we had to identify where each work station was to be set up as well as the common areas so he could install the necessary power, voice and data lines. With his help we addressed both our immediate needs as well as accommodations for the future. His expertise and assistance was invaluable.

It sounds like this is a considerable upgrade from your Akron location—what reaction have you received from your clients, staff, and the community?

Carol: Over and over we hear how this location is 10 times better than our old location. Even though our old location was on 272, it was further from the hub of Ephrata and the building wasn't particularly impressive—it certainly didn't draw your eyes to it. Here you just say "the big stone house behind McDonald's" and everyone knows exactly where you are. I hardly have the need to tell people the address. This is a big step forward for our staff and I think clients are impressed as well. It's a beautiful, professional workplace and I think it reflects well on Kingsway Realty as an organization.

Roger: There's hardly a day now that we don't hear something positive about our new home and how great it looks. I think it's made a very positive impression on the community.

Darryl: Even during construction, we had visitors coming by who wanted to take a peek of the old place and see what we were doing. Already it had become a local attraction.

Carol: Speaking of attractions, one thing we haven't talked about yet is the well out back. That was one of Darryl's brainstorms. To the rear of the main building, there was a well that had been covered up for years with a concrete slab. While we could've kept it that way, Darryl saw its potential and in short order convinced us to showcase it. With a little masonry work, strategic uplighting, and an attractive grate covering, it is now the main attraction in our beautiful





courtyard. I think the back of our building looks as beautiful as the front.

Darryl: Most hand dug wells we have worked with are 30' - 40' deep making it difficult to see the water near the bottom. For this particular hand dug well, with the water table so high in this area (only 14 feet below the surface ground level) it's very easy to see the water in the well bottom. It made sense to make it an attraction for everyone to enjoy.

Any advice for others contemplating such a project?

Carol: My advice would be to establish a budget but be sure to include some extra to cover the unexpected—and with older buildings, there will be surprises. What you don't want happening is getting three quarters through the project only to realize that you no longer can afford to do things correctly. For us, this was a long-term investment—and that's the way we looked at it. It was important that we kept our focus on what we set out to do. We didn't allow our aspirations to be dictated by the budget issues.

Roger: We agreed that we're going to see this to the end and that we were committed to doing it right. With the help of Middle Creek Builders and their team of talented trade partners, I think we did.

R&A



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