

Recycling a downtown house

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WINCHESTER- Little bits of the past lives of Kilmer and Associates' offices at 116 S. Stewart St. remain intact, even after significant renovations.

A dumbwaiter used by a doctor's office still has an opening next to the reception desk and an elevator installed during the same era is a boon.

A hefty, burnished wooden sliding door likely harkens back to the days when the structure was a home.

"I love this door," said R. Michael Kilmer, noting it might have been the reason he bought the building in 2008 to house his CPA firm in one of his favorite places - downtown Winchester.

Kilmer hopes other businesses decide to reuse downtown buildings, because he said with more business, the more prosperous the downtown will be.

For several decades, Winchester has seen a change of the retail and business district moving from the city center to the outskirts of the city as well as into parts of Frederick County. This business owner would like to see that trend swing back somewhat to businesses coming back to the downtown area.

This structure probably dates to the early 1930s, Kilmer said, and aside from being a home and doctor's office, it was also the site of an engineering firm's offices.

"The engineers did a nice job with the bones" of the structure, he said.

But, it needed some additional help before it became a place where he was comfortable doing business.

He hired a local firm, KEE Construction, which handled the renovations.

Kilmer said he wanted to maintain some of the character of the old structure, while updating it for today's uses.

He had the construction company retain all the old trim, but peel away all the old wallpaper, which was sometimes four layers deep.

The whole roof was replaced with shingles in front and metal in the back and the stucco building's dirty grey paint job was replaced with a warm beige.

The lot was re-landscaped, and inside, the walls painted neutral hues over surfaces evened out with new drywall mud.

The original wood floors were restored and new recessed lighting added to the ceilings in the approximately 4,200-square-foot building.

All told, the project cost about \$160,000 to \$175,000, he said.

Kilmer, 48, started his accounting business in 1998 in a rented space off Valley Avenue. As the firm outgrew its location, he began seeking a new home for it. His staff also includes CPAs Aaron Pifer and Mike Decker.

He considered the former Coca-Cola Bottling Plant on Valley Avenue, "which I still love," but it wouldn't work for his purposes.

Kilmer then turned his eye to downtown Winchester. He grew up in Frederick County and always loved the city's center.

He chose the location because he guesses the street will look in 30 years much as it does right now. He also wanted plenty of parking, and the Stewart Street site has 14 spaces.

It's also close enough to the Loudoun Street Mall to walk to its restaurants for lunch, he said. "I saw opportunity," even though the building's interior needed some work, which was more than cosmetic.

Sub-floors were torn out between the original house and a later addition, to help even out the floors.

The building not only holds Kilmer's offices, but those for two other entities - Don Crigler's architecture firm and Valley Hospitalists.

Crigler personalized his space somewhat, adding built-in bookshelves and a small wet bar in the very light, airy office.

"I love this office," Kilmer said.

Valley Hospitalists has a former attic space at the very top of the old home.

It's a place he feels good working in - all but one day a month, he said with a slight smile. That's the day he makes his mortgage payment.