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Downtown KCK gets a boost

Engineering company confirms plans to open an office in a former newspaper building.

By MARK WIEBE

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“It’s just about finding a tenant, selling them on the building, putting the financing together and doing the deal. And that’s the message we hope more developers begin to understand.”

City Vision Executive Director John Harvey

When city leaders talk about revitalizing downtown Kansas City, Kan., they usually speak of attracting new residents with the hope that strong retailers will follow.

But there’s another void that needs filling — professional services such as accounting firms, financial consultants and architects.

That void grew a bit smaller recently when a Johnson County engineering company confirmed that it would open an office in the former *Kansas City Kansan* newspaper building.

BHC Rhodes, with headquarters in Overland Park’s Corporate Woods, said it would provide civil engineering and surveying services by February. It has signed a lease with the building’s owner, City Vision Ministries.

President Kevin Honomichl said the firm would relocate several employees from the Corporate Woods office and about 15 from its surveying branch, already in downtown Kansas City, Kan.

“We’re treating it as a signature space for our company,” Honomichl said. “We want it to be a location where, when we have meetings with customers, they say, ”□‘Wow, this is a really cool space.’”

Honomichl said the firm has wanted to establish a Kansas City, Kan., location for some time. Last year it merged with Rhodes Surveyors, a longtime Kansas City, Kan., firm to expand into the surveying business and to capture some of the Wyandotte County market. Honomichl is confident the move will pay off, largely

because he sees hope for the city's urban core.

"I think you're going to see a renaissance in business interest in downtown," Honomichl said.

Downtown revitalization, while moving forward, had suffered setbacks recently.

More than a year ago, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers announced it would leave its downtown Kansas City, Kan., headquarters for a building in Olathe.

Eight months ago, City Vision, a nonprofit development corporation, stopped marketing the *Kansan* site for loft condominiums because it could not find enough prospective buyers.

City Vision purchased the three-story building at Eighth Street and Armstrong Avenue in 2002. It has spent \$1.7 million on environmental cleanup.

"Neither a rental nor a condo ownership strategy worked," said Executive Director John Harvey. "We couldn't get either one off the ground."

Unified Government Mayor Joe Reardon called the move a sign of good things to come.

"We think this is absolutely critical to the future of downtown," Reardon said. "And while we're focused on housing, attracting businesses and professional services to our downtown is certainly critical to its long-term viability."

Although BHC will occupy just one of the building's three floors, City Vision is optimistic about leasing the rest of the space for more commercial use.

"The key to the building was finding an anchor tenant," Harvey said.

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