Franklin Energy settles into new home

Written by Mark Jaeger
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FRANKLIN ENERGY SERVICES has settled into its new offices on the second floor of the former Smith Bros. Restaurant in downtown Port Washington. A gleaming new sign (top photo) admired by Jan Peiffer and Tom Quasius welcomes visitors at the company’s reception area. A conference room (lower left photo) offers a sweeping view of the lakefront. Company founder and current CEO Paul Schueller (right center photo) said the relocation is a sign of the company’s commitment to downtown Port.
Photos by Mark Jaeger

Downtown Port proves an inviting setting for cutting-edge company

When you are a nationally recognized authority on energy conservation, where you work says a lot about who you are.

For that reason, the renovation of the upper level of the former Smith Bros. Restaurant in downtown Port Washington into the corporate headquarters of Franklin Energy Services took a little longer than expected.

The energy-consulting firm moved into its new quarters on the weekend before Christmas, months later than originally planned. Ultimately, company officials said the wait was worth it, and they couldn’t be happier with the results.

“We knew we wanted to do this right. It is intended to be a showcase for the kind of work we do,” said Tom Quasius, senior vice president of corporate operations.

“The contractors were great to work with, especially Bolz Construction (of Port Washington). Just about every time we came up with a suggestion, their response was, ‘Yeah, we can do that.’”

Whenever possible, Quasius said, local contractors were hired for the project, including Mueller Heating & Cooling of Saukville, Harbor City Plumbing and painter Dave Schueller, both of Port Washington, and Wester Electric of Belgium.

Input on energy-saving measures was frequently offered by company employees who formed a sustainability committee for the project.

Motion-sensitive lighting is used throughout the building, and extensive insulation was added to

all the walls.

“It is kind of eerie to walk into the building first thing in the morning and have the lights turn on as you approach,” said Jan Peiffer, the company’s corporate communications manager.

Resource stewardship was also heeded in the project.

Recycled cubicles with shortened walls were used to make sure that the maximum amount of sunlight reaches workspaces, shredded newsprint was blown into interior walls to improve their insulation, volatile organic chemicals were shunned in such things as carpeting adhesive and $20,000 in high-efficiency bathroom fixtures were donated by Kohler Co. to create a demonstration site for the manufacturer’s newest products.

So much attention was paid to converting the former restaurant into office space, the company has applied for federal LEED certification.

Although not in place yet, the most high-tech feature of the new workspace could well be the window treatments that will hang in a conference room overlooking the north slip.
The shades will be light sensitive, allowing a lake view at all times but darkening to cut off glare when the sun reflects off the water.

At the direction of Paul Schueller, the company’s founder and CEO, much of the east-facing space is shared space so all of the employees can enjoy the lake view.

Attention was also given to the color scheme, with the signature hues of some of the company’s more prominent clients used at strategic locations.

The sprawling space has been divided into 14 offices, accommodating 42 current employees with room to grow.

The former St. John’s Church site that previously housed Franklin Energy had 10,000 square feet of usable space. The new second-floor office, in addition to amazing views, has 12,000 square feet.

“The difference between the new space and the church is that we are now able to work closer together because we are all on the same floor and the acoustics are so much better. In the church, you could hear conversations throughout the building,” Peiffer said.

Training facilities are also available for employees who come to the Port office from the company’s offices in seven states.

“The field of energy consulting is so new, we find that we are training virtually all of the people we hire,” Quasius said.

A 7-1/2-year lease of the Smith Bros. site has cleared the way for the City of Port Washington to lease the company’s former location for use as a senior center. That relocation is expected

sometime this spring.

The impact of the company's move, however, is already being felt by downtown businesses.

"We have been warmly welcomed by the business community. The weekend we moved in, Bernie's Fine Meats came over with a sausage tray, and we had a little celebration later that day at Schooner Pub," Quasius said.

Employees are also frequenting downtown restaurants and coffee shops with regularity, and hotel rooms have already been booked for out-of-town guests attending an upcoming energy conference the company is hosting.

Quasius said having such a steady influx of new business will make the space still vacant in what is now known as the Smith Bros. Marketplace more desirable to a business, such as a restaurant.

"Personally, I'd like to see a gym move in there," he joked, noting there are already so many tempting places to eat downtown.

Franklin Energy is finalizing plans for an open house at its new facilities sometime in February.

Started by Schueller in 1994, the company was purchased in October by Cortec Group, a New York private equity firm, which acquired much of the stock from Brass Ring Capital, a Milwaukee-based investment firm.

In 10 years, the company's workforce has grown from 30 employees to 237.