Sass Accounting hopes Saukville office will add to business' bottom line

The brick building at 221 E. Green Bay Ave. in Saukville dates to 1925, but from a functional standpoint the renovated offices of Sass Accounting are all new.

Originally built to house the Saukville Mutual Fire Insurance Co., the structure also served as the village's first free-standing post office for about a decade in the 1940s.

To say the new occupants gutted the buiilding might be a stretch, but not by much.

The accounting firm has been a cornerstone of the Grafton business community for almost two decades.

Still, Laurie and Jon Ziegler are ready for a new start in their refurbished Saukville office, which opened last week.

The building was formerly home to Saukville Chiropractic.

"Unfortunately, the building had been vacant for nearly a year and it was starting to become an eyesore. That was especially a concern for village officials because it is directly across from the triangle (Veterans Park)," Laurie Ziegler said.

The couple live in Saukville and had been looking for a new location for their business for some time.

"We just kind of stumbled on this location and thought it had a lot of potential and much more room," Ziegler said.

That potential only became apparent after a lot of work to both the interior and exterior of the building.

"We bought it in January, so we decided it would be my job to keep working on tax returns and Jon would serve as the general contractor for all the work," Ziegler said.

When he is not managing contractors, her husband handles much of the payroll work for the business.

The building's substantial to-do list included landscaping the front and back yards, reconstructing the entryway steps, adding a rear fence, knocking out a couple of walls,

replacing the carpeting, heating and air conditioning, and re-purposing a number of rooms.

“The chiropractic office had a small, very antiquated scrub room which we updated into a lunchroom,” Jon Ziegler said.

“We also upgraded the telephone and computer lines, probably more than we need, but when it is time to upgrade technology, we will be ready.”

Laurie Ziegler said she is especially happy about the creation of a conference room in the building, something she said she has wanted for years.

By supervising the work in-house, the couple figures they reduced the cost of the renovation by 10%.

In a fitting demonstration of mutual support, they relied heavily on accounting clients to perform the work.

Only two of a long list of contractors were not existing clients of the business, and one was a referral by a client.

“Except for a few bumps in the road, everything pretty much went as expected. I think we have a building we are both very happy with,” Jon Ziegler said.

His wife took that appraisal a step further.

“We love this building and location. This is the place we will be retiring from. No more moves,” Laurie Ziegler said.

Despite all the work, she said representatives of the Saukville Area Historical Society have said they appreciated the effort taken to ensure that the historical character of the structure remained intact.

Ziegler said financial arrangements were made with Port Washington State Bank to secure a construction loan to cover expenses even before the couple had a buyer for their Grafton building.

“From my involvement with them in the Grafton Chamber, Port State Bank was the only place I thought of going to and they really worked with us,” Ziegler said.

She said Village of Saukville officials were also accommodating.

“Dawn (Wagner) and Roy (Wilhelm) bent over backwards to help us feel welcomed, and I am excited about working with the Saukville Chamber, which seems to be making a real push. It is

exciting to be involved on the ground level of that group," Ziegler said.

The business is already a sponsor of the Live at the Triangle concert series, which offers free performance literally across the street from the offices.

Coinciding with the opening of the new location, Ziegler was installed as the first Wisconsin representative on the 15-member board of directors of the National Association of Enrolled Agents.

"I have always felt it is important to be involved in professional organizations at the state and national levels," Ziegler said.

Although numbers are constant, she said, the accounting business has seen significant changes during her years on the job.

"I pretty much started right out of high school and everything was done on paper. Now, of course, computers have changed a lot of that," Ziegler said.

"I remember we were one of the first businesses in the area to do accounting on a computer. Still, I remember having to go down the street to use the copy machine they had at the gas station. We didn't have one of our own."

Being located less than five miles away from the old Grafton office, Ziegler said she doesn't anticipate the move will cost any business customers.

"The new location is very convenient, and I am sure we should be able to pick up some local customers because there isn't another accounting business that belongs to the Chamber," she said.

Image Information: LAURIE AND JON ZIEGLER put a lot of time into renovating the new Saukville home of Sass Accounting. The firm relocated from Grafton last month into a building that dates to 1876. Photo by Mark Jaeger