



The \$18 million rehabilitation of the old York County Courthouse, now the Administrative Center shown above, transformed the building from courtrooms and judges' chambers into office space and meeting rooms for various county departments.

## A new life at 106

\$18 million rehabilitation turned old courthouse into administrative center

Daily Record/Sunday News  
York Daily Record/Sunday News

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Sep 29, 2006 — Visitors stop in the rotunda of the old courthouse to stare at the sky-blue dome above their heads.

Employees feel the soft curve worn into the old marble stairs from the heavy foot traffic through the years.

Others note the history the 106-year-old building has witnessed, such as the Hex murder trial in 1929.

York County officials will dedicate this old courthouse, now called the York County Administrative Center, during a ceremony Saturday.

The \$18 million rehabilitation transformed the building from courtrooms and judges' chambers into office space and meeting rooms for various county departments.

It served as a way to save the downtown landmark after moving the courts and related services into the new, larger judicial center two years ago.

"I'm glad they did," said 62-year-old Cary Fahringer of Manchester Township, who recently visited the old courthouse on East Market Street. "That's such a big part of downtown."

Employees moved into the building earlier this year and have started to make the place their home.

Third time's a charm?

This is Kelly Hildebrecht's third time working in the old courthouse.

In the 1980s, she worked in the 911 center when it was in the basement. In the 1990s, she worked as support staff for the district attorney's office for nearly two years.

Now she's back in the building as an administrative assistant for the York County Planning Commission.

"I've always liked the feel of this building," Hildebrecht said. "Hopefully, the third time's a charm."

The planning commission's new office on the third floor is a stark contrast to its former one in the old Bon-Ton building, which the county uses for Children and Youth Services, the York/Adams Mental Health-Mental Retardation, Drug and Alcohol program and other offices.

It had a mezzanine, and employees often heard the noise from the floor below, especially when the domestic relations office was located there. Callers could hear children screaming and bawling.

"I had a couple people ask me if we were running a day care," Hildebrecht said.

Now it's quiet, but the hard part is trying to keep track of everybody.

The office is spread out over most of the third floor. Hildebrecht said she might not see some co-workers for days.

The department is using an "Out and About" computer program that allows employees to post whether they are in or out of the office and when they will return.

Where's the space?

Real estate paralegals and title abstractors couldn't believe the size of the new Recorder of Deeds office when they first walked in.

It was much smaller than they thought it would be. The office is in the same spot it occupied years ago.

"(Randi Reisinger's) already outgrown the office," said Cheryl Miller, real estate paralegal with Griffith, Strickler, Lerman, Solymos & Calkins.

Reisinger, the recorder of deeds, said she had asked for more space, but she didn't get it.

The researchers like the remodeled area where they can work at tables, store their personal belongings in locked drawers and plug in their fax machines. It's the area where the computers and books are that's jammed.

Computer users have to move if someone wants to remove a book on a shelf underneath. Miller and others noted that the office was more spread out when it was temporarily housed in the old Bon-Ton building.

Although the office is back in the old courthouse, it's a different feel from years ago.

Workers don't get to talk with attorneys and hear the latest on court trials. Nor do they get to slip into a courtroom occasionally to hear a jury's verdict.

"We're the hustle and bustle of this building now," Miller said.

A real office now

Samantha Dorm has worked in one closet or another for the past six years because space has been tight.

Now the county's grant coordinator has her own office in the administrative center.

"Certainly, morale goes up when you're not in a closet," she said.

It's a more professional atmosphere, too, for meeting with people.

Her old digs at 1 West Marketway were situated next to an office bathroom, and "listening to the toilet flush several times a day was not very professional."

If she wishes, she can hold grant workshops in a new training center on the third floor. In the past, she has used township buildings or conference rooms at Pleasant Acres for such meetings.

Now she will not have to worry about carting audio/visual equipment and computers to those gatherings.

The center, which can hold 150 people, includes a white board, which allows officials to write on it and have the information pop up on a screen, television or laptops.

"For the work that I do, to be able to have a professional working environment makes a big difference for working on contracts and meeting with state, local, federal representatives on a regular basis trying to leverage funds for the County of York to alleviate some of the strain for the taxpayers," she said.

Together again

Some visitors used to think that the elections office had only a tiny space in 1 Marketway West.

That wasn't the case.

The department was split in two, and employees had to go across the lobby to look up files or get supplies.

Now the office is in one spot in the basement of the administrative center.

"We like it," office clerk Neil Manhard said. "We're all together for a change."

The office is more functional and makes their jobs a little easier.

The department now has five cubicles instead of two where visitors can fill out paperwork. Two have computers to look up voter registration information.

Two of the new electronic voting machines also are on display for people to try out before hitting the polls on election day.

"We're prepared for a bigger influx of people," Manhard said.

## If you go

**What:** A dedication ceremony and open house at the new York County Administrative Center, 28 E. Market St. in York.

**When:** 10 a.m. to noon Saturday

**Speaker:** Scott D. Butcher, director of business development for NuTec Design Associates, will talk about the challenges of renovating the historic building while maintaining its architectural details.

**Tours:** People will be able to take self-guided tours.

## Challenges abounded

**Tough part:** Blending the modern with the historic

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**At bottom:** · [The team](#)

Sep 29, 2006 — One of the biggest challenges of renovating the 106-year-old courthouse was modernizing the building while preserving the intricate architectural details.

For example, officials needed to install a fire sprinkler system in the building, but they didn't want to drill through the architectural details in the ceiling of the ornate Courtroom One, said Scott D. Butcher, director of business development for NuTec Design Associates Inc.

So they came up with the idea of placing the sprinklers in the side wall to preserve the intricate designs, he said.

In order to do that, though, they had to bring in a special consultant to show through computer simulation that a wall-mounted system would put out a fire.

The original floors in the J.A. Dempwolf-designed building posed problems as well.

Keystone ceramic blocks span the steel beams, said George Meshew, executive director of facilities management.

Cutting through that block would have compromised the structural integrity of the floor.

Crews had to use a more modern terrazzo on the first floor instead of a historic one because they couldn't dig down as far, said Julie McGill-Kopp, an interior designer with NuTec Design Associates.

They also had to install electrical and data jacks in the side wall of the training room because of the flooring, she said.

In the central corridor, crews added lighting to brighten the hallways. Workers installed fake bulkheads to allow the wiring to cross the center and hang lights.

The bulkheads blend in with the rest of the building.

The deteriorating domes and cupolas demanded repair, Meshew said. They were in such disrepair that the county risked eventually losing them.

That work alone cost nearly \$1 million.

## The team

- Architect: NuTec Design Associates of York
- Builder: Wohlsen Construction Company of Lancaster
- Electrical contractor: The Farfield Co. of Lititz
- Mechanical contractor: Frey Lutz Corp. of Lancaster
- Plumbing contractor: Herre Brothers Inc. of Enola
- Elevator contractor: Thyssen-Krupp Elevator of York

## Thoughts on the renovations

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Sep 29, 2006 — Favorite parts

"I like that they kept the character of the old building."

*-Rick Leiphart, pension administrator in the controller's office*

"We have a pretty nice break room. We have a television . . . plenty of vending machines. You can get anything you want from a sandwich to yogurt to soda or ice tea. And an ice machine. That's one of the luxuries - the ice machine."

*-Nikki Suchanic, assistant director of elections*

"My cubicle. I like the privacy."

*-Beth Rhodes, clerk in the assessment office*

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Least favorite parts

"I'd have to say the parking."

*-Ron Witmer, a county assessor*

"One of the things that we struggled with is handicap accessibility to the building. It's extremely difficult in these old buildings to make them accessible. We've tried to do that with a handicap lift, which is to the east side of the porch. While that's functional, it's got some design issues that we're trying to resolve right now. I wish we would have been able to design that lift and the little plaza that sits right out there . . . a little bit better. It makes the traffic - people using this secure parking over here - it makes it a little difficult to get through, get out onto Market Street."

*-Chuck Noll, the county's chief clerk/administrator*

"The security coming in the front of the building. I don't think it's needed. We have people coming in that are residents of the county for the most part, and to put them going through a detection device is wrong. I just don't agree with it."

*-Commissioner Steve Chronister*