

Commercial tenants taken in by local villages' charms

Although often old, town center properties have their advantages

By SHEILA LIVADAS

Even without skyline views or walls of glass and chrome, the demand for office space in Rochester-area villages remains strong. Along with efforts to refresh weary buildings, the emerging needs of "solopreneurs"—those who run their own businesses single-handedly—have helped boost its appeal.

Pedestrian-friendliness and the charm local town centers exude also have helped town office space hold its own.

"The office space in our villages and town centers tends to be smaller in scale than what we see in our office parks and central business districts," says Jonathan Murray, director of marketing and research at CBRE Rochester, an affiliate office of commercial real estate services and investment firm CBRE Group Inc. "While these properties may not always be well-suited to larger corporate users, the smaller footprint of these buildings allows them to serve the needs of many small businesses."

He adds: "Interestingly, while the space in our villages and town centers is often some of the oldest space in the market, one of the characteristics that makes it attractive is that it possesses the same qualities we are seeking to establish in some of our newest office space—a walkable environment surrounded by a variety of services, amenities and resi-



Jonathan Murray, director of marketing and research at CBRE Rochester, says villages often have the same qualities developers seek to create in cities.

dential opportunities."

Amid various revitalization efforts, occupancy of office space in downtown Geneva has been on the upswing since 2012, says Geneva city manager Mathew Horn. Lyons National Bank, for instance, moved its operations center in 2015 from Lyons to a building at the corner of Castle and Exchange streets that had sat largely vacant for years. Hobart and William Smith Colleges recently

relocated 70 staffers downtown and will do so with another 20 later this year.

"In addition, we've seen construction of several infill office spaces and conversion of space for medical and financial services," Horn says.

A census by the Geneva Business Improvement District, an organization launched in 1986 to promote 18.5 designated acres downtown, showed downtown's first-floor vacancy rate—including

properties not necessarily used as offices—at roughly 50 percent in 2009, Horn says. The most recent census, conducted in 2015, determined that the vacancy rate was roughly 20 percent and falling.

"The GBID estimates it at around 10 percent today," Horn says.

Property owners' efforts to spruce up available office space have helped them ink leases.

"Most of the market-ready space has been occupied, leaving buildings that need some work before occupancy. This is difficult to do speculatively," Horn says. "The most successful owners are ensuring that the curb appeal is there and that they are marketing the spaces aggressively."

Government leaders need to do their part to draw tenants to town-center office space, Horn says.

"Municipalities can continue to seek out funding opportunities to support property owners and work to keep tax and fee costs competitive," he says. "They also should be investing in information infrastructure, like fiber and WiFi, to support small businesses."

As a way to connect with solopreneurs, entrepreneurs and freelancers seeking new ways to work, last year the city of Geneva and its economic development partners opened Port 100, a co-working space on Castle Street. For \$150, members get access to shared workspace, a kitchen, a meeting room, printers, copiers, WiFi, and a high level of peer interaction.

Besides being receptive to new ideas, open lines of communication also help the market for village office space stay even-keeled.

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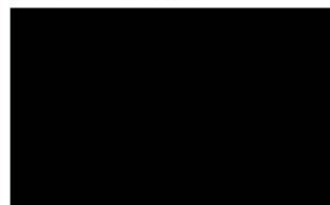
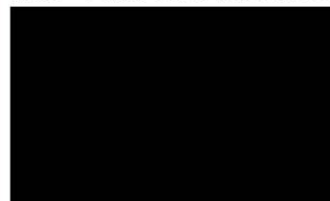
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We know an impressive work of architecture when we see it.

Whether it is a unique combination of materials synthesized into a composition, or how light plays across exterior and interior surfaces, we recognize the features of well-designed buildings and spaces.

But what goes into the making of truly excellent architecture? What are the guiding principles that lead toward groundbreaking new work? Which are constant and which are subject to change?

As architects work with clients and construction professionals to create new buildings, how each chooses to answer these questions helps produce the vibrant array of architecture we see being created.

Over the course of time, a long list of highly regarded architects have gone on record with thoughts about ideas that inspire them and observations that guide them. Whether in publications or as a result of media interviews, their comments give us glimpses of often hard-to-grasp aspects of the creative process.

I keep a number of books nearby for inspiration and reference. One that I consult often is a compilation of quotes from famous architects and designers by Laura S. Dushkes.

Her short little book "the Architect says (Quotes, Quips and Words of Wisdom)" is a simple series of quotes from a wide variety of influential figures. It includes voices from the past like Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea Palladio, along with leading contemporary architects like Norman Foster and Santiago Calatrava.

Here are a few of these excerpts that have been particularly influential, stimulating and provocative:

"Less is more"

—Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969)

Perhaps Mies' most famous work is the Seagram Building in Manhattan. He and his contemporaries endeavored to establish a new architectural style that would be representative of the modern



ARCHITECTURALLY SPEAKING
Jim Durfee

era. This quote has become an often repeated aphorism, succinctly defining a key tenet of Modernist architecture.

"Form (ever) follows function"

—Louis Sullivan (1856-1924)

Along with "Less is more," this famous phrase was taken up as a kind of battle-cry by Modernist architects practicing in the early to mid-20th century. Locally, office buildings like the Metropolitan (Originally Lincoln First Tower) and Xerox Tower are examples of this spare, unembellished approach to building articulation.

Louis Sullivan (Frank Lloyd Wright's early mentor) produced many influential buildings, primarily in Chicago. Interestingly, while his quote was taken to imply that decorative elements were superfluous in modern buildings, Sullivan himself did not necessarily design along these lines. His buildings, while spare and crisp in form, were punctuated by inventive decorative detail carefully integrated into the architecture.

Here in Rochester, buildings like J. Foster Warner's sturdy Granite Building are more directly reflective of Sullivan's era and influence.

"I started out to create buildings that would sparkle like isolated jewels; now I want them to connect, to form a new kind of landscape, to flow together with contemporary cities and the lives of their peoples."

—Zaha Hadid (1950-2016)

A recent New York Times article described Hadid's impact: "Her work, with its formal fluidity—also implying mobili-

prove parking is always appealing to both property owners and tenants—not necessarily adding parking, but making it very obvious where municipal parking is located," Brown says.

As in other nearby villages, the village of Fairport continues to experience strong demand for office space due to its "unique inventory of properties, access to village amenities and an abundance of free parking," says Martha Malone, executive director of the village's office of community and economic development. Property owners' willingness to readapt buildings also has kept up the momentum.

"These market demands have created small incubator office spaces, while landmark properties located adjacent to the Erie Canal have benefited from significant investments that transformed these former manufacturing facilities into successful mixed-use commercial developments," Malone says.

She adds: "As conditions and community priorities change, the (village's comprehensive) plan is updated to reflect (stakeholder) input and provide a consistent basis for decision-making."

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ty, speed, freedom—spoke to a worldview widely shared by a younger generation."

Her comment above gets at the conflict between iconic, standalone works of sculptural architecture and the need for buildings to somehow knit themselves into their context. This is an age-old balancing act that designers continue to confront.

"The sun never knew how great it was until it hit the side of a building."

—Louis Kahn (1901-1974)

Sometimes architects are also poets. Lou Kahn was one of these; a teacher and practitioner, his work was often transcendent. His First Unitarian Church here in Rochester is an example of his masterful manipulation of form, material and natural light. He created building forms that were at the same time dramatic and serene.

"I am deeply impressed with the designer of the universe; I am confident I couldn't have done anywhere near such a good job."

—Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983)

Fuller, the developer of the geodesic dome, reminds us of the architect's humor, bravado and respect for the natural world. His inventiveness and force of character influenced both his profession and the world around him.

"It is perfectly reasonable to talk about the meaning of literature without talking about Danielle Steele, but can you grapple with the impact of architecture without looking at Main Street?"

—Paul Goldberger (1950-)

A longtime influential architecture critic and educator, Goldberger reminds us that buildings are part of an ever evolving whole. They not only stand on their own but necessarily impact the public realm in a very important way.

"Have you seen the plans for Bilbao? They are incredibly beautiful. You cannot draw that by hand—it has to be done with software... I have always believed that art leads the way for architecture. Now it is technology's turn."

—I.M. Pei (1917-)

Pei, architect of the famous East Wing at the National Gallery of Art, is speaking of his colleague Frank Gehry's stunning tour-de-force Guggenheim Art Museum in Spain. So many of the dramatic architectural forms we have seen recently imagined and constructed have been enabled by computing technology. We have only begun to realize its potential.

The above "Quotes, Quips and Words of Wisdom," from luminaries of the profession, shed light on a complex, evolving creative endeavor. Much of an architect's work focuses on insuring a functional, safe and cost effective design. Sometimes an insightful quote can be a reminder that all such work aspires to something greater.

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"If elected officials keep in touch with the right people—in this case, property owners, small business owners and Realtors—they will have a much better understanding of how to make their village more attractive to tenants," says Katie Brown, building department clerk for the Village of Brockport.

To compete against office space in city centers or suburban office parks, villages need to be clean, visually appealing and crime-free, she adds.

When it comes to what building owners can do to put their best foot forward, "they should make the space functional, attractive and safe on the interior and exterior for tenants and customers," Brown says. "Owners should know the fire safety code so their building passes inspection and understand permitted uses for how their property is zoned."

She adds: "I would encourage property owners to be sensible when it comes to leasing. Affordability and reasonable conditions are important to small businesses."

Convenience matters, too. "Anything (villages can do) to im-



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