

CEDAR RAPIDS

Cherry Building home to about 30 small businesses

By Pat Shaver

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There's a buzz going on in a historic Cedar Rapids building in the New Bohemia district.

The Cherry Building, 329 10th St. SE, Cedar Rapids, houses about 30 small businesses. The small, local businesses range from floral shops, photography studios to musical instrument repair services.

It was built by the JG Cherry Co. in 1919 as a dairy equipment manufacturing plant. It has 104,000 square feet. The building features 12-foot ceilings, full-length factory style windows on the first floor, 30-foot skylights on the third floor, solid oak floors, individualized HVAC and electrical, free parking, storage space, and a break room and common area.

The property is managed by Thorland Co., a commercial real estate development and property management company. It also owns the Suchy Building, the Dostal House, the Varva House, and the Kouba Building.

Cedar Rapids artist Grant Wood painted a series of seven paintings of the Cherry Building, which are on display at the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, according to Thorland's web site.

In June, 2008, the building was 100 percent rented, according to Thorland Co. President Lijun Chadima. Currently there are about 5,000 square feet available on the first floor.

"The floodwaters were 12 feet above grade in the New Bohemia area, so the basement and first floor of the Cherry Building were completely devastated. The tenants really pitched in and helped each other out after the flood, and we were fortunate to receive a tremendous amount of help and support from community volunteers with the clean up," Ms. Chadima stated.



THORLAND CO.

The Cherry Building on 10th Street SE southeast of downtown Cedar Rapids is home to several small businesses and artists.

The entire building was professionally dried, disinfected and certified clean by an industrial hygienist, Ms. Chadima added.

"The Cherry Building is built like a fortress, so there was no structural damage, but we had to strip everything down to the subflooring and pillars and start all over again," she said.

"Old buildings like the Cherry Building really require a lot of TLC on an ongoing basis to keep them functional. We have always ploughed a fairly large percentage of our rental income back into the building," Ms. Chadima stated in an e-mail interview.

Cheryl Sheeley is owner of the Garden Wren in the Cherry Building, a florist and yarn store.

Her previous location in Palo was flooded in 2008. She operated the business out of her home until moving into the Cherry Building in September.

"I looked for studio space but I couldn't find anything I wanted. I really wanted to be in an artistic area that

supported the arts," Ms. Sheeley said. "As the New Bohemia district continued to grow and looked like it was moving in that direction, I decided to go to the Cherry Building."

"We have had tremendous support from the other businesses within the Cherry Building as well as the community. Everyone is happy to see us in the Cherry Building. I just feel like it's the right place for my business," Ms. Sheeley said.

As recovery continues in the district, more people are discovering the businesses in the Cherry Building.

"My customers who are familiar with me have found me and we are constantly finding and meeting new people who are learning that there are businesses in the Cherry Building and once they do I think they feel the same way we do about it," Ms. Sheeley said.

Michael Ask, owner of Heartscape Studios, a high-end portrait photography studio, has been in the building since 2005. He signed a 10-year lease

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and said he will likely sign for another lease there when it expires.

"What amazes me still to this day is there are people who walk in and say they didn't know it was down here," Mr. Ask said. "Its Cedar Rapids' best kept secret."

Mr. Ask believes the building and the businesses inside have bounced back become as strong as it was before the flood.

"The Chadimas seem to really be in love with the fine arts and have filled the building with creative, artsy, entrepreneurial type people. It's a really cool building because of that," Mr. Ask said.

Ashley Walthart, owner and photographer with AE Photography, moved her business to the Cherry Building January 2010.

Before moving into the building, Ms. Walthart ran the business out of her home. She and her husband knew someone who had space in the building and another person who took ceramics classes there.

"We went and looked and that was basically it. You walk in and it's an amazing building," Ms. Walthart said.

"The other tenants are a huge thing. The tenants in the building are so creative. Their creativity has brought our creativity out," she said. "The people actually make the building. Everyone is so

friendly and helps each other out; I just don't know where else you can find that."

Ms. Walthart's business specialized in wedding photography, senior portraits, along with family, children, pet and event photography.

Thorland Co. wanted to develop an environment where entrepreneurs and artists could thrive and grow their businesses. In combination with Legion Arts in the historic CSPS hall, the Cherry Building serves as an anchor for the entire New Bohemia neighborhood, Ms. Chadima noted.

"We had a couple tough years after the flood, but now the Cherry Building, and the entire New Bohemia neighborhood, is coming back stronger than ever," Ms. Chadima stated.

Following the flood, the first floor and basement of the building were completely renovated. Approximately 30 small businesses moved back into the building.

"We have a great mix of tenants in the building engaged in a diverse variety of business pursuits: musical instrument repair, photography, legal services, interior design, the Ceramic Center, light industry such as Eco Lips, Mortuary Lifts and AirCover Integrated Solutions, the TCR set shop, and of several working artist studios," Ms. Chadima stated.

Part of the renovation involved leaving space for a large open communal area on the first floor, which is frequently used for events. The building has hosted book sales by the Friends of the Library, art exhibits, lectures by the Ceramics Center, and a play was produced there this past year.

The JG Cherry Co. later became Cherry Burrell and moved to Sixth Street SW, and now is Evergreen Packaging. Rockwell Collins owned the building for approximately 20 years, and ran several production lines here in the 1960s and 70s.

Thorland Co. was formed in 1975. The company has worked with more than 75 entrepreneurs and artists to create contemporary business needs while preserving the building's history.

Ms. Chadima's father-in-law, Bob Chadima, originally bought the Cherry Building for his industrial supply and welding business in 1976. The business was later sold but he kept the commercial real estate under Thorland Co.

The New Bohemia neighborhood is centered on Third Street SE near the Cedar River. The neighborhood links the Downtown District with the Czech Village. The area is recognized as the Bohemian Commercial Historic District by the National Register of Historic Places. **CBJ**