

Biggs|Gilmore Expansion Refreshes Space In Kalamazoo

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KALAMAZOO — Growth has its benefits.

Maybe it's the jukebox, or the soda fountain with bar stools in the lobby. Biggs|Gilmore's redesigned office in the former Shakespeare Fishing Tackle factory building in Kalamazoo strikes one as bright, active and a bit whimsical — all of which are positive attributes for an ad agency responsible for marketing some of the largest consumer products brands in the U.S. A focus on digital has brought new business to the agency, and caught the eye of Advertising Age magazine, which it the best small agency for 2010. The company has been in growth mode, adding staff both in its headquarters in Kalamazoo and its office in Chicago, seeing 30-percent growth in its business in 2010.



Kalamazoo-based advertising agency Biggs|Gilmore expanded onto another floor in their current building and focused on open, collaborative spaces.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PIONEER CONSTRUCTION

“In a time when the advertising industry in general is shrinking, digital is growing, and this led to the building renovation,” Jane Tamraz, CEO of Biggs|Gilmore, told MiBiz.

With 100 employees now in Kalamazoo, the agency was looking to expand from its offices on the second through fourth floors into space on the first floor in the Shakespeare building. The expansion offered owners Tamraz and Mike Gerfen the opportunity to update their offices in the process.

Their landlord, Jeff Nicholson, president of PlazaCorp, was remodeling the building at the same time, but it left a short window for renovations. Biggs|Gilmore would move out Oct. 1, and the project would be completed Dec. 1.

“We try to keep our offices fresh, so we wanted to update the colors, the flooring and brighten them up,” Tamraz said. “We had just finished (the update) in our office in Chicago, and it had the more dynamic color palette. We wanted to update here to keep up.”

Pioneer Construction served as architect and general contractor for the \$517,000 project. Knowing that the timeline for the project would be extremely tight, project manager Jim Fifarek brought together Biggs|Gilmore's

representative, Keith Lewandowski with The Project Group Inc., building and planning officials with the city of Kalamazoo, and the landlord in a preconstruction meeting to iron out any potential setbacks.

“It was a very aggressive timetable. We pulled the permit the first of October, with a completion date around December first. We did a lot of work in a hurry,” Fifarek said. “During the preconstruction meeting, we ran our plans up the flagpole to see what they needed to see before it held anything up. The city was very accommodating with the project. It helped getting through it all up front.”

Biggs|Gilmore relocated to vacant space in former Pfizer offices owned by MPI Research four blocks away, no mean feat during what Tamraz said was the busiest quarter in their busiest year. Taking the move in stride, the agency employees dubbed their temporary digs “Camp Cupcake” and persevered.

“In that 12-week period, Pioneer did their magic, and we were very happy to be back home,” Tamraz said.

During the renovation, Tamraz and Gerfen wanted to keep much of the office’s open feel, but wanted to update it as well, freshening the feel of the space. In an industry that is centered on creativity, it was important to ensure the office exudes that feeling to clients and to employees in their workspaces. The company used Custer Office Environments and selected Steelcase products for the space.

Other improvements are less noticeable, but have made the office much more comfortable, said Tamraz. During the previous renovation of the building, HVAC equipment had been installed before the offices were framed in — leaving areas of the offices with insufficient airflow. Renovation and build out work consisted of removal of existing floor covering and gypsum leveling system to the original wood subfloor. A new Dura Cap floor system was installed, which was finished off with carpet tile, rubber tiles and a Wear Top System to level the floor of the historic building.

“When we originally designed the building, we were doing it with collaboration in mind. Office design is even more open now than it was in 2000 when we moved in,” Tamraz said. “As an ad agency, we are a little more casual than a lot of spaces in other offices. This has always been an open, warehouse space and we wanted to keep as much of the character as possible.”

By coming to the project with a clear design, the timeline of the project could be as aggressive as it was, explained Ffarek. “Biggs|Gilmore had an interior designer, determining their wants and needs, so a lot of the front-end work was dictated to us.

It was a matter of us putting it on paper,” he said. “It was truly a team effort — the Plaza Corp, Biggs|Gilmore and their interior designer, and the city. (The city officials) were more than accommodating to our needs, we were understanding of their needs, so we were able to turn things around in a timely fashion.”

Biggs|Gilmore Renovation

Contractor & Architect: Pioneer Construction

Tenant’s representative: The Project Group Inc.

Furniture dealer: Custer Office Environments

