

Library expansion, White Oak Builders earn state Main Street awards

LA CROSSE — The Watertown Public Library renovation and expansion along with White Oak Builders' design showroom earned high praise as the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation recognized the best downtown revitalization projects of 2022.

The awards were presented late last month at the 32nd Wisconsin Main Street Awards ceremony at the La Crosse Center in downtown La Crosse.

Watertown was recognized in two major categories with the Watertown Public Library renovation and expansion winning Best Public-Private Partnership in Revitalization, and Dan and Maggie Wegner of White Oak Builders winning the award for best interior renovation over \$50,000 for their new design showroom, 14 E. Main St.

In addition, Candy Stramara was recognized at the event as the volunteer of the year from Watertown for her many years of service coordinating downtown flower planting, serving on the city's Historic Preservation and Downtown Design Commission, and assisting in the development of the new history wall at the Bentzin Family Town Square.

"I am so proud of how far our downtown has come in recent years in terms of revitalization and beautification," said Melissa Lampe, executive director of the Watertown Main Street Program. "It's an incredible team effort that involves dedicated volunteers, city commitment and most importantly, the private business and building owners who have made, and continue to make, significant financial investments in their property.

"We welcomed 11 new businesses to our downtown in 2022 that likely would not have happened without these significant public and private improvements taking place," Lampe added.

Watertown Public Library Renovation and Expansion

Discussion to renovate and expand the Watertown Public Library began in 2014 with the release of a new downtown revitalization plan. In 2016, an advisory referendum overwhelmingly supported the library expansion project at the \$7M level, with a city of Watertown bonding contribution capped at \$4.38M. The project, however, remained in flux due to disagreement on scope and cost.

In 2018, the Watertown Library Board of Trustees took a new approach, presenting the community with a \$10M target, promising the city it would accept its bond offer, and started a \$5.6M private fundraising campaign led by The Sweeney Group. The library then developed a key partnership with the Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation, which was looking for impactful opportunities to connect underserved families with educational and social support opportunities through the Watertown Family Center (now Watertown Family Connections).

Miron Construction was hired to build the library, and groundbreaking occurred in August 2020. To avoid a disruption of services, the library moved three times within its expanding footprint. The project was completed in January 2022, with a grand opening in May. The historically sensitive renovation and expansion of the library greatly improved the appearance of West Main Street, it serves as a catalyst for nearby building improvement, and furthers the library's mission to engage, enrich and entertain all members of the greater Watertown community.

White Oak Builders' Design Showroom

Originally the Bank of Watertown, this historic building contributed to the overall development of commerce on Watertown's Main Street as either a financial institution or retail location since 1911. In 1854, the first Bank of Watertown was constructed on this site, but later replaced with the Neoclassical structure that stands today. White Oak Builders' overall project scope was to remediate years of water

damage and neglect by restoring the original features that made the building unique, thereby creating a functional, modern and light-filled space for future commercial use.

During the interior restoration phase, consideration was taken to preserve the original plaster detailing, replace missing decorative column elements and uncover the massive exterior windows that had been drywalled over during past unsympathetic remodeling attempts. Improperly run HVAC was relocated and replaced, all electrical was upgraded and all add-on wall and ceiling structures were removed. In addition, the original front door opening that had been converted to a large bay window, was restored and reactivated as the main entrance — a crucial part of the restoration and overall interior design plan. Among the original interior architectural features is the thick rope-like carved ceiling plasterwork. Before restoration, extensively water damaged acoustic ceiling tiles filled the space within the plasterwork frames. Today, classic dark wood panels fill this space, accentuated by the plaster framing, now painted bright white.

With an interior renovation project of this magnitude, funding assistance was sought and provided by the Watertown Redevelopment Authority. A façade grant was also provided by the Watertown Main Street Program.