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Business blooms from the ashes

Sanborn Building restoration completed 11 months after Thanksgiving fire

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ALEX PAJUNAS — The Daily Astorian

Rosann Karby, left, and her daughter Tiffany, explore Bloomin' Crazy Floral on the corner of 10th and Commercial streets inside the Sanborn Building.

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The interior of Commercial Street Antiques and Collectibles is bursting at the seams with old images, glassware and other treasures. The store, owned by Mary Krettler, inside the Sanborn Building has been open for more than a month.

If the floors in the Sanborn Building could talk, what tales they could tell. Salvaged after the 2008 Thanksgiving fire, the fir floors are among the most striking features of the newly restored downtown Astoria landmark. The scuff marks acquired over the decades only add to the floors' charm and the restoration's authenticity.

Now owned by business partners Mitch Mitchum and Rose Marie Paavola of Luottamus Partners LLC, the Sanborn was built in 1923 on the corner of 10th and Commercial streets on a site formerly occupied by The Daily Astorian offices and a livery stable. It was a year after the great Astoria fire had destroyed Astoria's downtown.

Paavola and Mitchum both love old buildings. Their objective from the start was to restore the Sanborn to the way it looked originally. Fortunately, Luottamus Partners' insurance picked up the seven-figure tab for the 11-month project.

"We took all the old pictures we could find of the old building and told the architect we wanted to make it look like that," Mitchum said.

Changes over the years

Over the decades, some changes had been made both inside and outside of the Sanborn, not necessarily for the better. Now, for example, the inset storefronts on Commercial have been restored. They were originally created to allow the old Bee Hive Department Store's customers to window shop out of the rain. Obscured for years, they have been restored, and now feature a tiled walkway.

The building has special meaning for Paavola. The grandfather of her late husband, Kenny Paavola, had a tailor shop on the second floor of the building in the early 1950s.

"I was born and raised in Astoria so I take particular pride in downtown Astoria. Commercial Street is our Main Street," Paavola said.

The Thanksgiving night fire claimed the life of Roger Martin, who died inside his business, Astoria Florist, where the fire started. The flames spread eastward to the rest of the businesses inside the Sanborn, which included a coffee shop, a photo gallery, a small restaurant and the Astoria branch of the Bank of America.

A year later, none of those businesses have returned to the Sanborn, but the building has three new tenants and room for three more. "Our new renters are wonderful," Paavola said.

Business is growing

Flooded with light from tall windows on two sides, the corner space that fronts on both Commercial and 10th streets is perfect for Bloomin' Crazy Floral, which opened six weeks ago. The flower shop is owned by Diane Berry, who garnered 29 years of experience working for local florists before branching out on her own.

"When Mitch showed it to me I knew it was the right place. It's kind of like a little greenhouse with all the windows," Berry said. "Everybody loves how the building has been restored."

Bronze Koi Beads, owned by Terra Glaspey, hasn't opened yet. It's moving from its location on Marine Drive into the space at 951 Commercial St., which is in the general area of the former Astoria Florist shop.

The 1,650 square-foot space boasts 17-foot ceilings. Tall columns that survived the fire stretch upward to support hefty roof beams.

Commercial Antiques and Collectibles, owned by Mary Krettler, has been open for a month. "We're having a great time," she said, as several customers perused objects ranging from old-fashioned kitchen items to historic photographs. "Everybody has just embraced us. They love that this part of town is getting renovated," Krettler said. "As soon as I saw this going in I said 'This is the place for me.' It just looked like you're stepping back in time."

The Sanborn is true to its historic roots, but its mechanical systems are modern and energy-efficient. The building's water and electric systems are completely new, it has a high efficiency furnace and double-paned windows and it's protected from fire by a sprinkler system. Its outside lights are controlled by a GPS locator that calculates sunrise and sunset instead of by photo cells.

Mitchum and Paavola are happy that the restoration after the fire has turned out so well. "We're pleased to be able to restore a building in Astoria that people are particularly proud of, to keep it

preserved as well as we can," Paavola said. "I feel absolutely wonderful. The contractor did a wonderful job. The workmanship is outstanding.

"We tried hard to use local contractors," Mitchum added. General contractor was Wilkins Construction LLC of Astoria. Principal subcontractors included Helligso Construction, P & L Johnson Mechanical, Clatsop Electric, Bergerson Windows, Morris Glass and Steve Winters Plumbing, all local companies.

The successful restoration of the Sanborn Building has earned Luottamus Partners LLC a significant federal tax credit and a reduction in state property taxes for 15 years. It has also earned the building a spot on the National Register of Historic Places.

"We were approved almost immediately," Mitchum said proudly.

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