

DeKalb City Hall opens in historic location

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DeKALB – DeKalb Mayor Jerry Smith describes the new, renovated location of City Hall at 164 E. Lincoln Highway as "classic character."

"I'm so excited for when people, especially history buffs, walk into the building," Smith said. "I'm excited at the prospect of having folks, longtime citizens, come in and see firsthand the old First National Bank building and its historical significance."

Smith said the building "will mean a lot to the renovation of downtown DeKalb."

"Our new location just adds to the character of an older downtown," Smith said. "Along with the Egyptian Theatre, Cornerstone [Development] and Plaza DeKalb, it's a combination of old and new. It's a good balance of architecture and character."

In May 2019, DeKalb City Manager Bill Nicklas proposed the move during a City Council meeting. The municipal offices moved from 200 S. Fourth St. to the Lincoln Highway location June 5.

"I thought it was important to move the city's government closer to downtown and the heart of the city," Nicklas said. "It makes the statement that we are here to serve our community. It brings back the concept of customer service, when you walk in and people greet you and ask how you're doing."

Although the building size was minimized from 24,000 square feet to 9,000 square feet, Nicklas said the new City Hall is "more economical."

"Our old building was built in the '60s and was made when we had many more employees, and the building was in need of updates," he said. "Before, [the Nehring Building] was rented. Now it's fully utilized. We use every inch of space while keeping the look of the building."

Historic fixtures were kept inside the building, including bank vaults, cabinetry and marble bathroom stalls.

The finance department and the building department are on the first floor of City Hall. Offices belonging to the mayor, city manager, city planner, human resources, administrative

law clerk and management analyst are on the second floor. The basement is used for storage.

Building history

The two-story Queen Anne-style building at 164 E. Lincoln Highway in DeKalb was built by DeKalb National Bank in 1892. The DeKalb Police Department was located behind the building in what is now a parking lot.

The building originally housed DeKalb National Bank and Sheets & Knodle Hardware. In 1902, the bank changed its name to First National Bank of DeKalb, the hardware store relocated and a limestone facade was added.

In 1917, the building was joined to the small building next door and the limestone facade was extended across the second building. In the 1950s, the building was remodeled. In 1966, the bank moved to its new location at 141 W. Lincoln Highway in DeKalb. Around that time, Paul Nehring purchased the building.

The building remained in the Nehring family until 2001, when Shirley Nehring, Paul's widow, donated the property to the DeKalb Park District. The park district rented the building to a number of businesses and organizations, including the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the DeKalb Area Agricultural Heritage Association.

On Dec. 27, 2019, the park district sold the building to the city of DeKalb for \$1.

Before the city moved into the building June 5, renovations took place, including restroom upgrades, carpet replacement, painting and computer, and internet updating.

"We're grateful to the park district and city council for working with us and for the move," Nicklas said. "City Hall needed to be downtown. More people are investing, shopping and living downtown. Now they can stroll to City Hall. We'll be able to interact with people and have a central location for many, many more years to come."

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