

NEW HOME

Housing nonprofit moving downtown



Photos by Brian Arola

Kirsten Becker, communications manager at Partners for Housing, goes through a scrapbook of news stories on the nonprofit over the years. The book was one of many items moved to the nonprofit's new downtown office space in recent weeks. Partners had to move after the sale of its previous rented office space on Good Counsel.

Partners for Housing office lost Good Counsel space

By Brian Arola

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Partners for Housing's clients regularly deal with the challenges of finding an affordable place to live in the Mankato area.

Earlier this year, Partners found itself in a similar situation. The sale of its Good Counsel rental space to Loyola Catholic School meant the housing nonprofit had to find a new home.

The parallels aren't lost on Executive Director Jen Theneman.

"Early on when I found out in January, it was kind of like: 'What are we going to do?'" she said.

Clients face even more barriers in finding housing, she said. But the time and effort involved in finding a new location within an affordable price range can be stressful whether you're an individual, family or organization.

Partners ended up finding office space on the second floor of Mankato to Place. The nonprofit is nearly finished with its gradual move from Good Counsel to the new location in the former mall.

Relocating downtown has its benefits, like being more centrally located for clients and being closer to its nearby Theresa House and



An old stained-glass window from the Theresa House shelter made the move from Partners for Housing's Good Counsel office to its new downtown space.

Welcome Inn shelters. The trade-off, though, is higher rent.

It'll make fundraisers and grants even more important going forward. The rent increase amounts to more than three times the previous amount.

"There are pluses and minuses of moving, but it is something that keeps me up at night to think about how much more we're spending,"

Theneman said.

Partners' first fundraiser after the move will be a wine and beer tasting Nov. 13 at Circle Inn in North Mankato. Tickets for the Sips 4 Shelter event go on sale Nov. 1.

While the move is nearly complete, the Partners office team has been working between two

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Brian Arola

Boxes of donated pillows, quilts and COVID-19 supplies nearly reach the ceiling at Partners for Housing's downtown office space at Mankato Place. The nonprofit's team is readying the second-floor office as it nears the completion of a move out of its previous, Good Counsel office space.

PARTNERS: Less storage space in new location

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locations in recent weeks. Shelter operations weren't impacted, as staff work on-site at them.

Staff at the office found help from family and volunteers in readying the new space. A group of retirees — Sandra Loerts, Dorine Baker, Claudia Cooper, Barb Eide, Virginia Carr, Carol Meyers-Dobler and Meyers-Dobler's sister, Barb — volunteered to pack boxes and help put new address labels on envelopes and forms.

Meyers-Dobler is the nonprofit's former director.

Other volunteers helped staff paint the downtown office, said Communications Manager Kirsten Becker. She credited volunteers Bridget Norland and Jeni Bobholz with lending a hand on the painting.

Apart from a hired moving crew, Theneman and Becker were tasked with hauling items downtown over the course of many trips back and forth. Becker made another trip Tuesday, afterward pointing out all the boxes of donated pillows and quilts and COVID-19 supplies stacked along a wall nearly to the ceiling.

The move turned up relics from the nonprofit's history. Becker pulled out one, a stained-glass Theresa House window, before showing a thick scrapbook of articles on Partners over the years.

All of it and more is getting sorted into new places as the nonprofit settles in downtown. Getting the Internet up and running is the main remaining holdup, Becker said.

"Most of our stuff is here," she said. "But we can't come here until we get Internet service. That's kind of our glitch right now."

The downtown office has less storage space than the previous location. People often call the nonprofit wanting to donate beds or other big furniture items, but there won't be

as much room for it now. Monetary donations will be most helpful going forward.

Once ready, though, Becker said being downtown should be a positive for clients.

"It's more convenient for them to get here," she said. "We also really are grateful to have our own space so we can maintain the type of confidentiality that's required with the type of work we do."

Conference rooms at the downtown space will now be available for programming, Theneman said. Residents at the nearby shelters downtown could use them for classes on budgeting, parenting and other skills.

Previously, the nonprofit had to find space elsewhere to offer such programs.

Having downtown signage also could get the nonprofit's name out there to more people who could use its services.

"It puts us on the map," Theneman said.

Partners is now serving about 96 households per day. It has 11 full-time staff — six working on housing programs or administration and five working at shelters — plus part-time and support staff.

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