

METRO SPIRIT

AUGUSTA'S INDEPENDENT VOICE

Intelligence in renovation

Company redesigns downtown building for headquarters

by : Erika Bolin



Greg Kirby and the restored ESI headquarters.

The jackhammer sounds are ceasing and the dust is settling as 823 Broad Street heads towards completion of its renovation.

The historic corner building adjoining the Common will soon be the headquarters of Emergency Services integrators (ESI).

ESI CEO Nadia Butler said of the extensive project, "We love downtown and I think this building shows our commitment to its growth. And it says we are here to stay."

The building has been carefully brought back to life with a combination of preservation and technological upgrades.

"Our clients are committed to saving people's lives and they feel we help them do that," Butler said. "Here we are committed to saving downtown's life."

Her company offers high-level Web-based software systems that are utilized in emergency management and public safety sectors around the world. "As an example, the Red Cross can access our Web Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) product suite and tell another emergency service how many beds they have, or do not have available during a disaster. All via the Internet in real time."

ESI's impressive client list includes the Kennedy Space Center, Jet Propulsion Laboratories (NASA), Delta Airlines,

Balad Air Base, Iraq and more than a dozen U.S. Department of Energy sites, including DOE-Savannah River.

Butler, whose company has been located downtown for 15 years, said, "The first part of the rebirth of downtown is revitalization. We are proud to be involved. We chose to be downtown. We chose to pick a building that was here rather than build somewhere close by because we love downtown."

For the task of creating ESI's state-of-the-art facility, the software company turned to Augusta's Kirby Fahrion and Associates.

"It was big job," Greg Kirby said. "The building was all one level. We added a second floor. And the basement, which was originally claimed to be unworkable, was brought up to code."

Hints of the remodeling are discreet from the outside. A new streamlined architectural wall line designed "to draw the eye" is mixed with the original edging and columns facing Broad Street.

ESI's internal spaces are clean and technical with details designed for functionality. The entrance hall is lined with the building's original marble. On either side are individual office spaces. Each space has a thick plate glass wall system with glass doors that operate on polished stainless steel glide tracks.

Kirby explained, "There's nothing like them here. We imported them from London. The wallpaper is synthetic ultra-suede. It's unbelievably expensive. But when you have the marble and granite you need something like this for the acoustics. The overhead lighting is designed to have no hot spots. It is geared towards minimal eye strain, which allows for comfortable computer work for hours. And there are no light switches. They are all motion controlled."

On the added second story, there is a conference room designed for any emergency situation the ESI team may face. It is designed for wall-size projection and features retractable shades that can be lowered over the paneled glass to dim the room and improve visibility.

Project designer Robert Woodhurst said, "We took the space from an old bank to a high-tech business. They wanted a wow effect when you walked in. They are keeping the historical elements like the hall clock and the bank vault and elaborately refreshing them. It is visually delicious and still speaks of [ESI's] image."

On the subject of cost for taking a one-story, corner building and turning into a multi-level technology company complete with a garden area on the roof, all were mute. Kirby acknowledged, "There was no expense spared. The company has been based here for 15 years. The level of work being put into this building shows a continuing long-term commitment to downtown by ESI."

Butler admitted only that final figure was "a significant investment."

The building should be ready for occupancy in the next month. ESI is expected to bring a few new jobs to downtown as well.