

A Vision for Doing Good Through 'Shared Spaces'

NORBERTO SANTANA JR. | Posted: Tuesday, July 12, 2011 9:17 am

Tuesday, July 12, 2011 | It's a weird question to get from your landlord.

Need any office furniture?

Yet that's the kind of welcome that retired PIMCO co-founder Bill Podlich and retired architect Warren Lortie offer new tenants, like Grandma's House of Hope, when they move into Village at 17th Street, the nonprofit office complex near the border between Tustin and Santa Ana.

"He is the space planner for the new tenants," said a smiling Podlich as he glanced at Lortie, who over the past year has become his partner in creating the Orange County Shared Spaces project.

Small nonprofits often need access to a large conference room or training room but can't afford them. So Podlich and Lortie decided to build these amenities with the idea that nonprofit organizations will be able to share them as long as the price is right.

One result of this vision is the 35,000-square-foot Village at 17th Street. It is a \$3.5-million project, and the foundation Podlich and Lortie created has invested about \$600,000 into the building so far.

They've built a 2,500-square-foot conference center with a boardroom and training room and are finishing the copy center. More than \$100,000 has been spent to upgrade the building's aging elevator and another \$100,000 on air conditioning.

The monthly rent for a nonprofit in this renovated building is \$1.35 per square foot, which is considered below-market. So far the building is about half full.

The deal on rent is just one of the benefits that Podlich and Lortie see coming out of their project. Having headquarters close together encourages lots of cooperation and innovation among participating nonprofits, Podlich said. "Our goal is to enhance what they're doing."

And for donors like him, it's a chance to help lots of nonprofits and their causes.

The two retirees themselves have benefited from their collaboration, spending the past year bonding as they remodeled the 1950s-era office building.

They plan an open house Thursday to unveil the new complex to the media.

Podlich and Lortie worked from a national model that has similar nonprofit office complexes popping up across the country. They found there are real advantages to these types of creative work clusters.

Podlich said he got the idea from the San Francisco-based Tides Foundation. He said Shelley Hoss from the Orange County Community Foundation helped gather the leadership team that eventually connected him with Lortie, who helped find a building.

Lortie said that within the first 10 minutes he was hooked on the idea. According to workers at the complex, the pair have spent months on-site tending to details as small as choosing office colors and helping nonprofits move in.

Over the months of renovation, the foundation has amassed a stock of office furniture, and items from the surplus are often offered to new tenants.

Lortie said he liked the Santa Ana-Tustin area because of its central location and affordability. He raved about the architecture of the building, which includes an open courtyard with lush landscaping. The building also has its own parking lot.

Lortie says providing headquarters for nonprofits is a good first step, but he is devising ways to help nonprofits with their core missions.

He imagines slumping shopping centers being transformed into nonprofit centers offering daycare and other services to nearby neighborhoods.

"Service centers are the next target," he said.

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