

Restoring sacred space

Former church to become lively community center By Beth Hawkins

The word “devotion” takes on new meaning when you walk through the doors of the former St. Joseph’s Catholic Church at Oak and Sixth. Not in the religious sense, but more along the lines of “Wow, this is a big commitment.” The chapel has been stripped down to its bare, but beautiful, bones – revealing brickwork that needs mending, paint that’s peeling, and a long list of other cosmetic fixes.

Undaunted by a restoration of epic proportions are owners Mark and Susie Kubiak, who are turning the 1907 church – standing vacant for several years after the church moved into its new sanctuary on Lincoln Avenue – into the elegant and lively Heartwood Building. It will be a community center that’s perfectly appointed to house music events, weddings, plays and more.

“We saw an opportunity to save something that needed to be preserved,” Mark Kubiak said of the building. The Kubiaks have experience in turning an empty church into something new: They purchased the former Episcopal Church across the street in 2007, turning it into the Redtail Gallery and Sandpoint Center for the Arts/Arts Alliance. And with their newest acquisition, the couple envisions this corner of town as a future “arts district.”

While Mark Kubiak grew up in Spokane, Susie moved to Sandpoint with her family, Jim and Joyce Fenton and two siblings, in 1972. She has always loved beautiful buildings and architecture. “I’d love to see more of Sandpoint’s buildings restored,” she said. At least her family is doing their part – Susie’s sister, Julie Meyer, recently purchased the former Belwood’s Building in downtown Sandpoint with her husband Steve, and the couple is in full renovation mode. “My sister has a similar interest in old buildings,” Susie said. “It’s a good thing.”



As for the Heartwood project, a few structural issues have been revealed during the renovation process, but the couple says they knew there would be a few surprises along the way. Architect Bruce Millard and contractor Pucci Construction are guiding the project, and notable changes are already taking place with the removal of the chapel’s balcony and a new roof over the annex.

Over the winter, work moves indoors where the barrel-shaped ceiling in the chapel – the Kubiaks call it the “hall” – will be painted, and new bathrooms and a commercial kitchen, ideal for a caterer, will be added in the annex’s basement.

Mindful of energy efficiency, the couple is replacing the old boiler with a high-efficiency gas unit and plans to add rain gardens into the landscaping to collect runoff. In addition, the couple ensured that the tranquility of the neighborhood was kept intact.

“We saved all the trees we possibly could, and are adding a few more,” Susie said.

The historical significance of the project is important for the community, according to Marilyn Sabella, a trustee

Mark and Susie Kubiak are renovating the original St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, a 1907 building, into the Heartwood Center. PHOTO BY BILLIE JEAN GERKE

for the northern region of the Idaho Heritage Trust as well as an adviser for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

“The Kubiaks’ sensitive restoration of the original St. Joseph’s Catholic Church is a huge gift to our community today, and also for those who came before and built, consecrated and worshipped in the church from Christmas Eve 1907 onward,” Sabella said. “They are saying, ‘This place matters.’”

When the project is completed, projected to be fall 2013, the hall will seat up to 165 people. With a new stage and cosmetic improvements on tap, the space will be ideal for weddings, performances and more.

“It’s fun to think about it when it’s all finished,” Susie Kubiak said, as she envisions the Heartwood Building at its completion. “I look forward to the music and the theater and the life.” 