

DELIVERING EXCELLENCE ON A POST OFFICE BUILDING RESTORATION CASE STUDY

JEFFERSON CENTER
TOLEDO, OH





All photography courtesy of Sandvick Architects, Inc.

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Walt Erickson, Owner, Interstate Commercial Glass & Door

+ PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Architect

- Sandvick Architects, Inc.
- Randy Doi, Sr. Project Architect
- Karen Borland, Project Architect
- Elizabeth Crooks, Exterior Envelope Specialist

Construction Manager

Gilbane Building Company

Installer/Design-Assist Contractor

Interstate Commercial Glass & Door

Product

1200H fixed offset (simulated hung) and 1200H fixed (single plane) windows

+ CHALLENGE

Brought on early in the design process, Graham and AR Design teamed up to provide cost-effective, historically authentic solutions to the window design process.

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“I know this sounds like something a salesman would say, but the earlier you get us involved, the smoother the project will go,” says Tim Davis, president of AR Design, a Graham Architectural Products rep and a window designer.

For proof, he points to the rehabilitation of the Jefferson Center in Toledo, Ohio.

Opened in 1911 as a U.S. Post Office and sorting center, the building was designed by James Knox Taylor, supervising architect of the Department of the Treasury from 1897 to 1912. Toledo Public Schools purchased the building from the federal government for \$1 in 1966, then operated it as the Jefferson Center for Vocational Rehabilitation. In 1970, the building was converted to an alternative school for troubled teens. Two years later, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Old Central Post Office. Yet in 2000, its doors closed.

For years, it stood vacant, even dodging demolition in 2011. In March of 2019, the Toledo Board of Education sold the building to ProMedica Health Systems, a mission-based not-for-profit. Two years later, ProMedica announced that it would partner with Bitwise Industries, a Fresno, California-based entity that works to help people from underserved populations land jobs in the tech industry.

The Restoration Begins

Responsibility for breathing new life into this dilapidated building was given to Gilbane Building Company, which hired Interstate Commercial Glass & Door on a design-assist basis to help with the window selection

process. Walt Erickson, owner of Interstate, explains the role, saying, “What that really means is, they hired us and said, ‘Hey, we need you to help design the windows and storefront—all the glass and glazing—with the architect, and make sure we’re within budget. And if you can do that the job is yours.’”

He continues, “In a traditional job, the architect designs everything, and they just send it out to bid and say, ‘price what we want,’ right? This is more like building a race car from scratch, rather than ordering a Camaro.”

It was a smart move for several reasons. First, the windows were going to be costly. The building had 139 openings and would need more than 350 historic replication windows. Second, as Elizabeth Crooks, exterior envelope specialist for Sandvick Architects, explains, “When it comes to matching historic design, the windows are absolutely critical to attaining these tax credits.” Finally, the combined expertise of Davis and Graham Architectural Products would make a big difference.

AR Design and Graham Earn the Job

In the spring of 2021, Crooks was working with Davis on another historic restoration when she mentioned the Jefferson Center project, which Sandvick had also landed. Davis called Erickson, who said he had been asked to get preliminary prices from three window manufacturers.

Erickson sent Davis preliminary drawings. “I looked at the job, and I put it on spreadsheet. And I did enough work to know that it was something that we do well,” Davis says. “I called Walt and said, ‘Walt, we can knock this out of the park. You can get prices from two other people, but with the tax credit, the size, the complicated geometry, the attention to detail, and the architect, this is a great fit for Graham.’”

Eventually, Gilbane gave Erickson permission to partner with Davis and Graham. Davis met Crooks at the site, then Davis priced it up, offering

alternate prices on varying Graham window systems—all of which were capable of withstanding National Park Service and Ohio State Historic Preservation Office scrutiny.

“It’s a stunning sandstone building with great detail. And the whole second floor is giant, half-round, fixed windows,” says Davis. But the original windows were replaced long ago, and the team had little documentary evidence to serve as a basis for replication. “They had very little to go off of, that’s for sure,” says Erickson. “So it was a lot of back and forth between the architect and Tim.”

He continues, “Fortunately, Tim has been with Graham for so long, he doesn’t need someone at Graham to tell him what they can and cannot do. When you’re going through a design-assist project like this, where there’s a lot of questions, and the architect says, ‘Well, okay, what about this? What about this? What about this?’ If you’re not working with the right group of people, it might take two weeks to get true answers. With Tim and Graham, they might answer it literally right there on the phone.”

Early Involvement Pays Big Dividends

Because they were brought on early, the Graham-AR Design team made two more key contributions. While walking the job, Davis noticed a keystone protruding into the top of the openings. The team considered cutting the panning to fit around the protrusion, but Davis says, “Even at the head of the window, that’s really disturbing the integrity of the panning from a water standpoint.” After collaborating with Graham Design Engineer Jim Hicks, Davis suggested installing separate extrusions onto the panning on either side of the keystone as an alternative solution.

“That saved us a lot of trouble later,” says Crooks. “We were able to incorporate that in design before things were manufactured.”

A wide vertical mullion up the center of the window gave the Graham/AR Design team another chance to shine. The team first suggested having a subcontractor install a vertical post in the middle of a typical opening. That would then be clad in aluminum. Tim and Graham countered with an all-aluminum window design solution that eliminated the need for the vertical post and another element to coordinate. “Because of the strength of Graham’s window design, we were able to save the client money and reduce the complexity of the installation by installing the window without a separate structural support,” Crooks says, adding “That was a win-win for everybody.”

Happy Ending

The order, design and manufacture of the window all took place during the pandemic. Graham had some supply chain issues that hindered supplying the windows in a timely fashion. But because of all the care and planning on the front end, everything fit like a glove once the windows and various accessories were delivered.

Erickson says, “It’s probably the most attractive window we’ve ever worked with. Graham has an excellent product. They’re the best in the industry when it comes to providing custom historical windows. But with complex custom projects like this, sometimes industry standards for lead times really can’t be met because there are so many components and difficulties to properly design these, build these, and put these together. And those challenges were dealt with and were overcome. And everyone was very happy in the end with the product.”

Crooks agrees, saying, “Graham’s windows on the Jefferson Center are absolutely stunning and have played a significant role in bringing the beautiful, Old Central Post Office back to life!”



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