

Mulberry 426: Reinvented



Charlie Jefferson, left, and Austin Burke review plans in Burke's former office. Jefferson is partner with Jefferson-Werner, which has over 20 years of experience in Pennsylvania and New Jersey; Burke has been President of the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce since 1981. Photo by Guy Cali Associates



Charlie Jefferson, left, with Jessica Kalinoski, property manager, and Dave Perrotta, construction manager. Photo by Guy Cali Associates.

Jefferson-Werner recently celebrated the opening of Mulberry 426, the renovation of the former Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce building into 40 market-rate residential rental units and four street-level shops. With over 20 years of real estate development experience, Charlie Jefferson explains,

“All of the historically significant elements of the building such as the facade, common areas and the fireplaces of the boardroom and library have been retained and incorporated into the apartments. The facade was restored with historically correct windows and trim. The lobby and entrances on both Mulberry and N. Washington streets were also restored to their original function. While some people may think the entrance on N. Washington is new, it was in fact originally there in 1926. It was designed as a newspaper stand where one could enter from the street, purchase a paper and such, and then go through another set of doors to the lobby. The lobby is designed around the original configuration as well. Historic doors and trim were reused on floors two through four to mimic the locations of offices in 1926. We went to great lengths to rescue the original 1926 elevator and modernize it.”

“Scranton is a great place to do business, and NEPA is an underestimated area. The people and the work ethic remind me a lot of the way things used to be. There is a real demand here for new, well-designed rentals in the downtown. People in general want to be around other people. There is only so much interaction you can have when you are stuck in a garden apartment where you need a car to buy a cup of coffee. Young professionals and retired people alike want to get out and walk around and be part of a neighborhood. Nowhere in NEPA is this more possible than in downtown Scranton. We are once again 100 percent leased before completing the project. (Connell Lofts, our other project, to this day remains consistently 100 percent occupied.) We have built many new buildings, but our passion and focus remains historic rehabs. Anyone can hire an architect to design a new building on a vacant piece of land, but it takes a special talent and commitment to search out an old building and breathe new life into it. There is a great feeling that comes from being able to walk around and see people you know and sit in a local coffee shop or restaurant and watch the passersby. It’s why NYC is admired by so many people. We do urban projects in non-traditional places because no one else will. It is the ultimate in being green. While everyone talks about LEED certified projects and sustainable materials, you

can't get any more environmentally friendly than saving a 60,000-square-foot structure from the landfill. I believe it is incredibly important to preserve the past for the next generation. There is a respect aspect for those who originally designed and constructed that landmark. There is a connection with the community that just can't be equaled with a new building."

—**Charlie Jefferson**
Mulberry 426 Developer



"My office on the second floor was literally the wonderful corner office that we all aspire to, with a view of City Hall and The Scranton Club. It is now a very attractive, well-lit kitchen. I am delighted that Charlie Jefferson was able to create an upscale project that people will be proud to live in and that the city will be proud to have on such a highly visible corner."

—**Austin Burke**
Scranton Chamber of Commerce President

The Old Days



In 1923 "The Board of Trade" officially became The Scranton Chamber on November 21, 1923.

At that time, the national slump in business, instead of discouraging the new Chamber, set them searching for larger quarters. The Mulberry and Washington site was purchased from the Maloney Oil Company for \$100,000. The construction of an impressive stone structure tested the courage of the newly organized Chamber of Commerce and became an act of faith, indicative of what would be needed in the future.



A four-story building was drawn up with the price of \$800,000. To finance this ambitious building, \$400,000 in second mortgage bonds were sold to Scrantonians. Scranton banks advanced \$300,000 through first mortgage bonds, and \$100,000 was raised through office rentals.

To meet interest payments and amortize this indebtedness, members of the Chamber included in their annual membership campaign the raising of a \$25,000 sustaining fund. In this way, this imposing headquarters was paid for over the years.



The Chamber moved into its spacious quarters, ready to expand its many fields of usefulness to the community and to the state. On this historic occasion, the members rose in the auditorium to sing, "Cym Rhonda," with Hayden Evans accompanying on the \$50,000 organ donated by Colonel Laurence A. Watres.

The organ led to Sunday afternoon concerts in the Chamber auditorium. The promoters of these musicals later formed the Scranton Concert Association.

The Chamber headquarters was the envy of every chamber nationwide. Chamber membership topped 4,000.

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