

Historic restoration

Letting in the light

An historic church becomes a modern office that is part of the global economy

BY CINDY GRAHL | EDITOR
PHOTOGRAPHY BY H/P HUTCHINS PHOTOGRAPHY

The old Christian Science Church across from the Lakewood Public Library was almost 100 years old, and threatened by demolition, but fortunately it was sold to new owners who wanted to use the historic space for decidedly more modern and secular needs. A company called 15422 Ltd., a real estate investment company, acquired the building for a tenant, a recycler of plastic with export channels around the world as well as in the U.S.

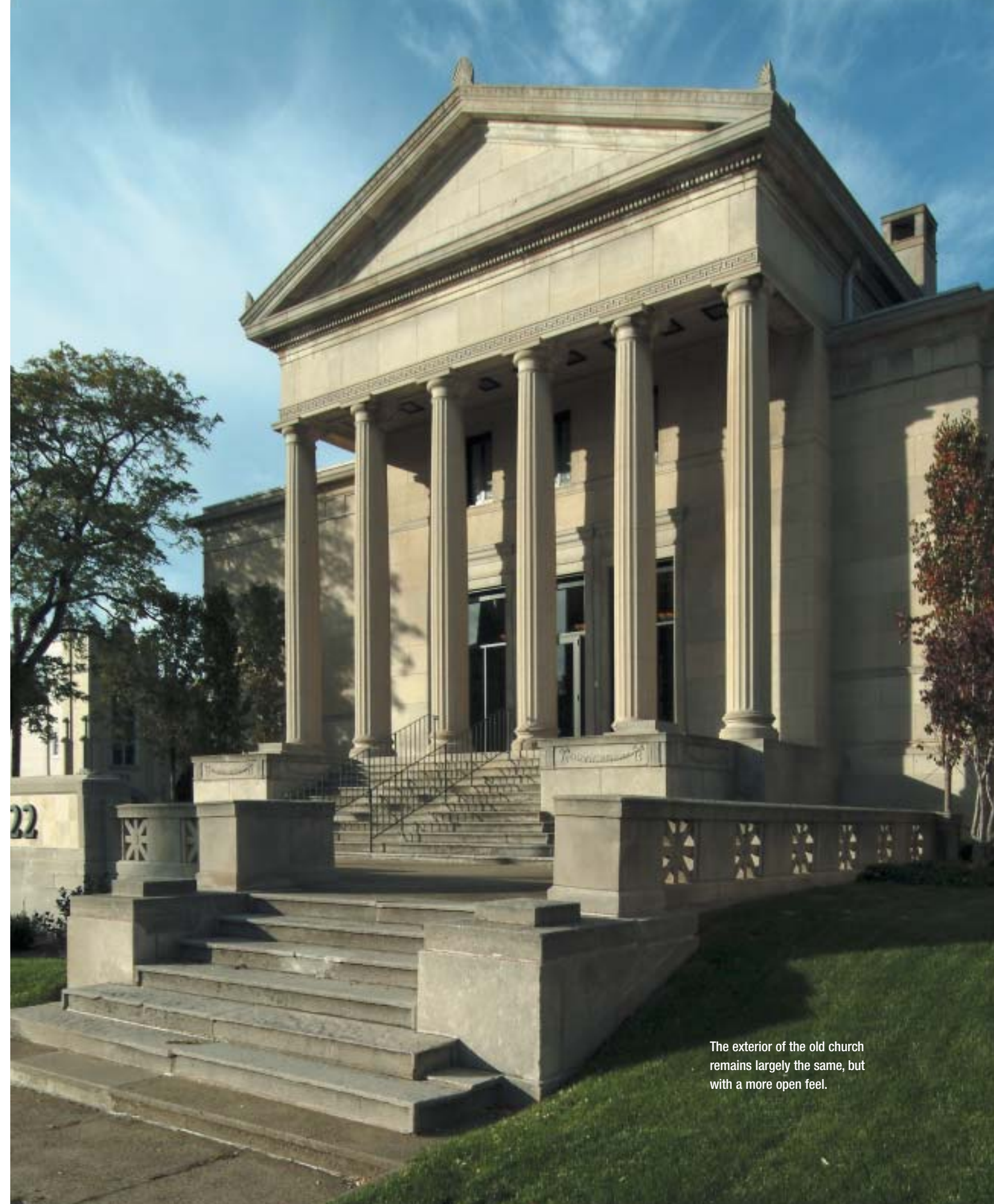
The firm wanted an unusual, and extraordinary and an historic building for its headquarters. It respected the past, but could be beyond the organ and pews to prepare it for the future. “We had to preserve the history of the interior and the exterior while accommodating the latest technological advances,” says a principal at the tenant. So Vocon Design and D-A-S Construction were brought in to help, as both had the breadth of experience and the expertise needed for performing such a project. They also had the vision and leadership qualities required. “I can’t say enough about them, said the tenant’s spokesperson. “They understood the vision of what we wanted to do.”

“Turning this church into an office space was the most interesting part of this project,” says Larry Lacure, the estimator at D-A-S who worked



A very elegant dining area for tenants.

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The exterior of the old church remains largely the same, but with a more open feel.



Left: The renovated building keeps an air of the gracious past, and a working fireplace.

Below: A full industrial kitchen is available for employee use.

Facing: The offices in the old nave area are topped by a beautiful vaulted ceiling. Sound management was taken into account.



on the project.

D-A-S, in turn, brought in Vocon Design as the architect. Julie Trott, RA and LEED AP, says that the major challenges in this project were the historic church structure in

and of itself, and finding a balance that would let the new owner meet its needs within that structure. “We tried to maintain the integrity of the historic nature of the building,” she says. “It was nice to see

clients who wanted to maintain an historic structure. It is a nice balance between renovation and restoration.”

D-A-S and the architect worked together on changes to determine how the job could be

made better, with Vocon handling the documentation.

“So many people just want to build a drywall box,” adds Patric Sauers, site superintendent for D-A-S, who appreciated the chance to work on a demanding project.

“We had to maintain the identity of the building,” adds Lacure. “We did open up the entrance a little, using a grand foyer effect and getting in more light. But we left the exterior intact.”

ADA compliance was also a challenge. The grand stair at the entrance could not be compromised, but an internal stair was torn out to allow a landing at the problem elevation that would be accessed by a side ramp. “It’s like a split level, something you don’t see anymore,” says Lacure.

Adds Sauers, “We altered the handicapped access to minimize the use of space in the building, so you could have appropriate ADA access without taking up too much floor space.” Reconfiguring the staircases and adding a wheelchair lift brought the first level down to an at-grade entrance.

Beyond that came the main part of the office itself, in

the old church nave. The overhead part of the nave has a barrel vaulted plaster ceiling that had to be kept. “It is really cool,” says Lacure. Any problems with sound transmission under the ceiling were solved with glass partitions to allow visual and light access, as well as a sound masking system and sound traps in the ceiling.

Below, the nave floor was raked and had to be leveled

inside to meet office need. Wiring is located under the new floor. “We had to appreciate the space for what it is,” Trott says. “It is open and stately and we wanted to use minimal elements on the main floor to keep the space open. We leveled out the floor, using ramps and stairs, and elevated some areas.”

The existing altar area remains a few steps higher than the office floor. Ramps can take

all workers to this level, where a lunch room is now located, separated from the office area by an etched glass wall that gives some differentiation of use but lets in light. A full kitchen, with a hood and range, lies behind it for the company’s own use.

Despite the formality of the old ecclesiastical space, the office has a casual atmosphere, says Lacure, with a war room

and conference room on the upper balcony where there was once a choir loft and offices. A glass wall separates them acoustically, if not spatially, from the main nave floor below.

MEP a challenge

MEP was one of the biggest challenges on this project. “In old buildings, it is hard to get mechanical systems to fit through unknown areas, routing piping

The conference room is located in the old church choir loft, with a great view of the activity down below.



“We had to maintain the identity of the building. We did open up the entrance a little, using a grand flyer effect and getting in more light. But we left the exterior intact.”

Larry Lacure.

and conduit”, says Sauers.

Adds Lacure, “The challenge was blending the needs of a modern office into an old church with no A/C. we had to add MEP upgrades and infrastructure, and snake ductwork around the corners of the old structure.” Round register grilles were used as an element in the plaster cornice work, to tie in with the original aesthetic, vs. a standard drop-in diffuser — there was no dropped ceiling to hide ductwork, but “it tied in perfectly,” says Lacure. “Our guys are very talented, and creative.”

A part of Lakewood’s history

The former Christian Science Church at Detroit and Arthur was recently converted at an investment of about \$1 million to business use. The building is sited on former farm acreage, next to a popular retail center and in front of Lakewood’s Kauffman Park, with its miniature golf course, tennis courts, and baseball field.

The property belonged to Frank Andrews, a prominent orchardist, who grew pears, plums, cherries, apples, grapes and giant strawberries, adding his presence to Lakewood’s early fruit-growing industry. He is noted for his experimental work in the cross-pollination and grafting of fruits and flowers, and Andrews St. in the city is named after the family that settled on the site. The Andrews property included a smaller home, located behind the Christian Science Church and occupied by the church custodian and his family. It was demolished during the rehab project, to better meet the needs of the new owner.

Look for further development in the area right across the street, as the Lakewood Public Library receives a new addition designed by Robert A. M. Stern Architects and built by Panzica Construction. **BXM**

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**“We had a good time with the client.
They were a lot of fun to work with.
They cooperated with us, and that
always makes for the best projects.”**

Patric Sauers

“We were able to keep some old architectural elements, like the old doors, and incorporate new aspects,” adds Sauers. “And saving became a priority. We all had to agree if something was to be torn out. We were able to save a lot of the crown molding and columns and recreate the rest. We also kept some of the marble base and then matched the existing.”

As with all old buildings, he adds, you run into variables, and this was no exception. “There are always unknowns and change orders when you open up the walls and see what things actually look like.” Oth-

er finishing touches included landscaping outside, disassembling the organ for another site, and putting a gas fixture into a working fireplace.

“We had a good time with the client,” says Sauers, “They were a lot of fun to work with. They cooperated with us, and that always makes for the best projects.” The project came in on budget and the staff moved in on Labor Day, after a seven-month timeline. Overall, the new office can house up to 75 employees by using basement space – there are currently 15, but the tenant is in a definite growth mode. **BXM**



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Project specs:

15422 Ltd.'s Office Building

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|--|-------------------------------------|
| Owner: 15422 Ltd. | ■ Eagle Fabricators & Erectors Inc. |
| Architect: Vocon Design | ■ Ferenc Lakeside Electric Inc. |
| GC: D-A-S Construction | ■ Gratton Building Specialities |
| Timeline: February-September 2005 | ■ Highpoint Finishing |
| Cost: \$1 million | ■ I.C. Clean |
| Vendors: | ■ Imperial Heating & Cooling Inc. |
| ■ ABC Glass Contractors Inc. | ■ Manufacturers Wholesale Lumber |
| ■ Acme Glass & Mirror | ■ Messina Floor Covering Inc |
| ■ Anderson Industrial Construction Co. | ■ Midpark Interiors INC. |
| ■ Armour Painting Co. | ■ Pella Window & Door Co. |
| ■ Cleveland Vicon Co. | ■ Precision ProCut |
| ■ Corcoran Tile & Marble | ■ Samuels & Co. |
| ■ Diamond Mechanical Contractors | ■ Team Environmental Inc. |
| | ■ Willham Roofing |