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Five R.I. companies come together to transform building while the business inside stays open

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444 Willett Avenue - Riverside, R.I.

Riverside, RI The thing Rhode Island is perhaps most famous for is for being (at least for the last 245 years) the smallest state in the U.S. A recently completed renovation project in this East Providence neighborhood demonstrates this admirably. One of Rhode Island's largest employers and one of the biggest pharmacies in the country is CVS. They are, in a way, a representative of Rhode Island on nearly every Main St. in America, projecting solidarity and dependability to the customers.

When Rhode Island born and based developer Steve Lewinstein decided to upgrade the appearance of the building he had purchased at 444 Willett Ave. it desperately needed improvement. The building was covered in decaying T1-11 siding, which was a product primarily popular in the 1960s and 1970s. To undertake the design of the renovation, Lewinstein called up Ross Cann (RA, AIA, LEED AP) of Rhode Island-based A4 Architecture + Planning. Starting in 2006 with the transformation of his Long Wharf retail center in Newport, A4 Architecture has transformed

acquisitions of his company into buildings that better fit into their communities and attract both tenants and customers.

The success of the project was made possible by five different Rhode Island companies: Lewinstein Associates, the CVS Corp., the Dryvit Corp., A4 Architecture, and R.D. Angell Construction.

When Cann reviewed the situation at Willett Ave. he envisioned a building that looked more solid and permanent than the one that was there. He was reminded of the brick and limestone built for post offices on Main St. locations throughout the 1920s and 1930s. He also noted that the building lacked the necessary insulation in the walls to meet the current energy codes. But how could these issues all be addressed on a tight budget that made economic sense while keeping the business open? The answer came from a Rhode Island company: the Dryvit Corp. Known for making Exterior Insulated Facing Systems (EIFS), the company recently developed an innovative product they called “NewBrick”. This is a modular EIFS product that was light and thin but has the identical texture and color as actual brick units (with both smooth and wire cut finishes offered). It could be built upon the existing building framing so the business could remain open during the renovation, Cann saw that this could solve three main problems of the project (aesthetics, insulation, and budget limitations) with one approach. Cann said “The opportunity to transform the building’s appearance, improve its energy performance and complete this work affordably while the business remained open was a winning solution. To do it by bringing five Rhode Island-based businesses together was a wonderful bonus.”

A design for the project was developed using a mix of three colors of NewBrick to give the building the same varied appearance as the 1920 brick structures that were to serve as the model and inspiration for the renovation. When the time came to bid on the project, because the majority of the building was going to be laid up in masonry units, the Rhode Island masonry contractor R.D. Angel was selected. Although they had never installed the NewBrick product before, as long-time masonry contractors, the owner Larry Marini and his son Dennis had a good understanding of how the product should look if actual masonry units were used. The work began in March 2021 and was completed in June with the CVS location operating normally the entire time. Seeing the building for the first time in many months, the owner joked that he almost drove by the building because he did not recognize it. The deteriorating T1-11 siding was gone and a new brick appearance building was now in its place, anchoring a corner in the neighborhood.

The new building will hopefully stand as a proud testament to what “Made in Rhode Island” can mean (for many decades to come) in a state that highly values and promotes sustainable design and historically inspired architecture.

A4 Architecture + Planning is an award-winning full-service architectural practice serving the commercial, hospitality, institutional and multi-family markets. The practice was founded in 2004 by Ross Cann who holds architecture and architectural history degrees from Yale, Cambridge, and Columbia University.