

# Chicago native refurbishes downtown building for event uses

Original architectural details remain in structure built in 1929

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Typically, a restoration project for Bryan Gillespie involves an automobile.

The Chicago native owns Cool Cars Inc., an auto-customization business at 7514 Preston Highway, and his company upgrades models often found at events such as Carl Casper's Custom Car Show.

But Gillespie's latest project can't be found in a showroom. It is a showroom or, better said, a show-place.

Gillespie has bought and renovated the former Leonard Hardin Building at 421 W. Market St. in downtown Louisville and converted it into an events venue suitable for upscale weddings, corporate events, charitable galas and social occasions.

He's given his name to the four-story, 54,000-square-foot facility, calling it The Gillespie.

It already has hosted two wedding receptions, and another 15 to 20 events are on the books for 2009, according to its managers.

A grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, March 19.

## Owner 'fell into' events business

For Gillespie, owning an events venue and banquet hall is a major departure from his day job.

He dabbles in real estate and owns several investment properties in town but acknowledged that he had no idea what he wanted to do when he bought the Hardin building, a former bank branch and offices, in September 2006.

"I just kind of fell into it," he said of the events business.

The building now known as The Gillespie was constructed in 1929 and designed in the Art Deco style.

Interior features include Corinthian-style columns, gold accents, original marble and crystal chandeliers.

Over the years, the building housed operations for Lincoln Bank and Trust Co., First National Bank of Louisville and National City Bank.

It took its previous name from Leonard Hardin, who retired as chairman of National City Bank of Kentucky in 1999. Hardin began his long banking career at age 17 with Lincoln



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Bryan Gillespie, left, owns The Gillespie building, where Sharon Bell, center, of Memorable Celebrations, and Lauren Jerome, of The Catering Co., have offices. Bell also handles sales and other tasks for The Gillespie, and Jerome's business provides service at the banquet hall.

## \$1.6 million paid for property

Gillespie bought the bank building for nearly \$1.6 million from a group of investors. He said he is unsure of the total amount spent on improvements

Renovations included painting, electrical upgrades and updating of woodwork and trim, according to Gillespie.

A bride's room was built near the back of the building, and a kitchen area was added for caterers.

The Gillespie's first floor and mezzanine levels are currently available for events. Seating capacity is about 600 people, according to Gillespie.

The old bank vault has been reconfigured into event space for smaller gatherings of 70 or fewer people.

Gillespie said plans call for space on the third and fourth floors of the building to be rented for conferences and business meetings as it is upgraded. That process has not yet started.

## Two tenants serve banquet hall

The Gillespie has two tenants that have established offices in the building.

Memorable Celebrations, a 16-year-old events and wedding-planning company, is located on the second floor. Its principal, Sharon Bell, handles sales, event

coordination and management duties for The Gillespie.

"It's a great big beautiful blank slate."

Bell said she expects The Gillespie to benefit from its proximity to the Kentucky Inter-

national Convention Center and downtown hotels, restaurants and attractions.

Her events firm shares office space with The Catering Co., which serves the banquet hall but is not the only caterer allowed to do business there.

Outside event planners also are welcome.

Diana Polsgrove, president and CEO of Eventualities Inc., a Louisville event-planning company, said she has talked to The Gillespie's managers and seen pictures of the renovated facility. She is impressed and would recommend the venue to clients.

Polsgrove described the site as "totally different" from any other event space in Louisville and said it is obvious that the owner cares about the finished product.

"It's a great big beautiful blank slate," Polsgrove added, and it lends itself to "just about any use."

She predicted that it will draw many weddings and corporate events. "I think it's always exciting to have a new venue."