

Training fund buys building

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Note: A program that trains sheet metal workers will open a second local facility in the old Springfield News spot

SPRINGFIELD - The old Springfield News building, vacant since 2006, will become a training center for sheet metal workers.

A group called the Sheet Metal Training Fund, a statewide apprenticeship and training program for sheet metal workers, has purchased the 14,000-square-foot building at 1887 Laura St. in Springfield. It currently leases a 4,000-square-foot building in Eugene, Executive Director Dennis Boyd said Friday.

"We're just looking to grow our presence," he said. "We're looking to make a bigger commitment to statewide training for our employers."

The Sheet Metal Training Fund is a partnership of Sheet Metal Workers Local 16 and the Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors National Association, Boyd said.

"It's a real collaborative effort," he said.

The group bought the building for just under \$1 million, Boyd said. The previous owner, David Hinson LLC, bought it from newspaper group Lee Enterprises in 2007 for \$729,000, according to county records. Iowa-based Lee Enterprises owned the Springfield News until it folded in 2006.

The building is "a fixer," Boyd said. The Training Fund plans to do some renovations and make it more energy efficient. Sheet metal workers probably will do some of the work as part of their training, he said. Renovations are estimated to cost somewhere between \$300,000 and \$700,000, depending on what work is done and when, he said. The building will have classrooms, a sheet metal shop, a building shop, computer lab and maybe a meeting room, he said. It's not certain when the building will open, but it will be some time between January and next summer, he said.

Workers spend about 35 percent of their time in class and 65 percent of their time doing hands-on training in a shop, he said.

The training fund trains about 35 apprentices a year in the Eugene-Springfield area and about 150 journey-level workers get continuing education.

Dan Egan, executive director of the Springfield Chamber of Commerce, said he was glad to hear the vacant newspaper building will be getting new life.

"It's one of those buildings where you wondered if anyone could make it work," he said. "It bodes well for the future economy for them to make an investment here."

And the prospect of more training in a skilled trade also is welcome, he said. "The trades will be central to the economy coming back, and we want to have people in place ready to match up with the economy," he said. "Those are good jobs that are intimately tied to the economy."

Justin Schmick of Windermere Commercial Real Estate, who was the listing agent for the building, said, "I'm really excited about (the sale). This could spur job growth in the area, which we need. It's a good use for the building."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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