

Project consultants can smooth way for nonprofits with construction needs

BY GWYNN BRADLEY
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Of all the businesses that want to expand into new buildings, nonprofit organizations may be the ones working on the smallest budgets.

But constructing a new location is not impossible, especially if you have creative help.

Katie Smythe Thinnes, founding artistic director of the New Ballet Ensemble, credits the addition of a consultant for making alliances with a sympathetic contractor and architect when NBE renovated a warehouse for office and studio space.

"It hurt," she says. "It was expensive to us, but it's worth it."

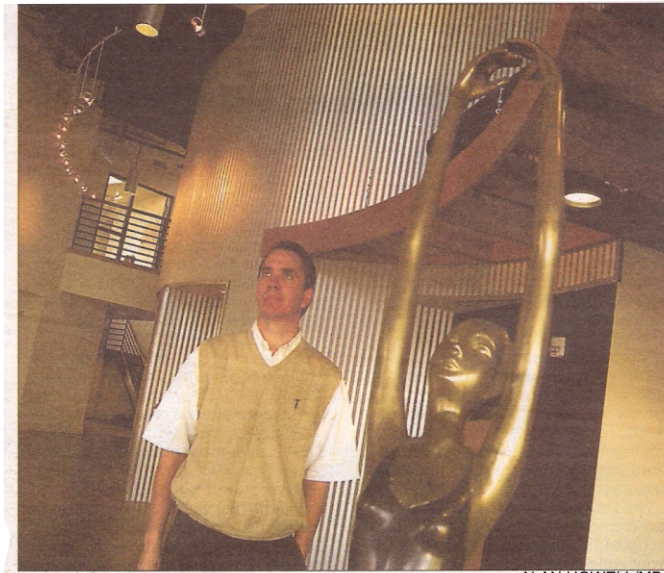
Arnoult & Associates, Inc., a company specializing in consulting nonprofit organizations, was key in getting the best people involved in the project, she says. But it did set NBE back \$60,000 for six months.

Arnoult & Associates worked to develop a capital campaign to raise more funds, then helped in the hunt for a contractor. It was important to look for companies that had helped nonprofit organizations in the past, Thinnes says.

The contractor NBE hired was Grindler Haizlip Construction Co., Inc., which had previously built a center for Memphis Athletic Ministries.

The project also needed an architect, so NBE sought one that understood that the design plan had to be functional, not aesthetic.

Michael Walker, architect and principal at Johnson Bailey Henderson McNeel Architects, was hired after designing a plan that focused the finances on the most used spaces.



ALAN HOWELL/MBJ

Chris McDermott acted as project manager for the New Ballet Ensemble renovation.

Grindler Haizlip Construction Co., Inc.

General contractors

Owners:

Henry Haizlip, Greg Grindler

Address:

1746 Thomas

Phone:

(901) 377-1000

Web site:

www.grindlerhaizlip.com

Once all the parties are on board, it's key to keep up continual communication, says Chris McDermott, the project manager at Grindler Haizlip who assisted in the NBE renovation.

On the NBE project, McDermott, Walker and Thinnes met frequently to prioritize goals and "get the budget in the budget," McDermott says.

The plan evolved several times as the three reevaluated spending choices and solutions, he says.

Jim Boyd, president of the nonprofit Bridges, Inc., was also involved in extensive planning with his architect and contractor during construction of the Bridges center.

"We gave them several criteria of what we wanted to include in the design of the building, and they helped us with the plan," he says.

Making rooms at NBE multifunctional afforded the biggest savings, Walker and McDermott agree.

"We made a plan that was multi-format and not more square footage," McDermott says.

"For example, the boardroom can be used as a homework room," Walker

says.

McDermott and Walker also opted for standard materials over custom ones and substitute materials, like wood framing instead of steel.

But there are some items you shouldn't skimp on, they say. For example, both say you shouldn't try to cut costs on structural items like doors and water fixtures. They don't need to be high on design, but they must be functional and efficient, McDermott says.

The best advice is to plan early, according to Walker.

"View case studies," he says.

"Know what you like and what you don't like and how your building needs to work."

You should also plan ahead five to 10 years, Boyd says.

"You need to anticipate the costs after building: the maintenance and the long-term."

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