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## HISTORY ANEW

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## The Smiley Building

*Story written by Jennaye Derge | Photos provided by The Smiley Building*

Is there a secret to happiness? Some theories suggest finding happiness through human connections or having a strong sense of community. Others recommend finding happiness through the simple act of smiling. In downtown Durango, The Smiley Building might be the culmination of all of these theories.

The building lives up to its namesake as a place that brings the community together, connecting the people who step inside and bringing smiles to everyone.

Contrary to its happy name and positive vibe, the Smiley building was erected during the Depression-era in 1936. It originally stood as the Emory E. Smiley Junior High School until 1961 when it graduated to become a high school. It remained such until 1994, when the school moved to its current location on the north end of town. The Smiley Building was left empty for three years until brothers John and Charles Shaw, along with Charles's wife Lisa Bodwalk, decided to take the plunge and rehabilitate the building into something they'd been dreaming about for years.

Soon after the purchase, the trio got to work, and the 45,000-square-foot building received an evolutionary makeover. They began with bare-bone interior renovations, turning old classrooms into bright, welcoming office spaces before transforming the exterior aesthetics with gardens and walkways.

To reduce the building's carbon footprint, the Shaw brothers- with the help of friends and volunteers- installed an innovative solar-powered system. The 20,000-square-foot roof, now covered in solar panels, makes the building far more energy-efficient, keeping utilities bills low and environmental friendliness high.



The Shaws and Bodwalks have had numerous volunteers and tons of help along the way to transform the building into the community epicenter for connection that it has become today.

Over the years, the Smiley has grown. It currently houses 59 of 64 businesses that range from yoga and chiropractic offices to architecture and consulting firms. Each brings a unique energy to the building, and resonates with the warmth, friendliness, and innovation that is all a part of Charles Shaw's plan for the vision and overall purpose of the building.

**“I am intentional with who I bring in, but it’s not anything specific, it’s not about what they’re doing, it’s more about who they are and if they will help add to this ambiance, vibe or whatever it is that’s here,” Shaw said.**

Charles is a key player in bringing the building back to life. It is his job to keep the heartbeat going, to give it breath where and when needed, whether that be building new offices or just making sure those offices are filled with the right kinds of life.

“There are so many different kinds of tenants here. I want to have it be as mixed-use as possible and to keep whatever kind of energy that this building has. I want those sort of tenants that support that and add to it,” Shaw said.

No one can really put a finger on the exact formula for how the Smiley building came to be so “smiley,” but one person who might have an idea is Carrie Hladik. As the owner of the Smiley Café, located in the building’s main entrance, she sees the majority of the comings and goings. Besides the café’s patrons, Hladik and her staff are the first faces you see when you walk inside, and she is a self-proclaimed, unofficial information booth for the four-story building.



When Hladik and her original business partner first took over the cafe in the spring of 2016, it wasn't nearly as bustling as it is now. Maybe the building hadn't quite grown to what it is today. Maybe the scent of Hladik's fresh-baked, gluten free goodies weren't yet permeating the halls. One thing is certain though, since her tenure, the activity has picked up in her little corner of the world.

"We see all kinds of people and that's one of the things I love too, whether it's someone who just moved here living out of their van, or the people who are here every day pouring their hearts and souls into their work, or whether it's all the non-profits or the artists. I think it's kind of fun to be able to help people," Hladik said.

Visitors might initially come to the Smiley Building for the café. With an array of fresh, baked delectables and specialty soups done in-house, sandwiches, wraps or locally sourced coffee and tea drinks, who wouldn't? But, what keeps people coming back is the deep sense of gratitude, appreciation, and connection that Hladik fosters within the space.

"These special connections happen here and I feel like it's serendipitous and not by mistake. We're providing a fertile ground for these relationships to form and a lot of that happens here. It's lovely when people come up to us and say 'thank you' for making the connections happen. That's my favorite part, just standing back and observing," Hladik said.

Carrie doesn't simply stand back and observe. She is always at the counter, greeting tenants by name and sharing a smile with anyone who passes by – perfect for everyone who visits the Smiley Building.

While this vintage building has a fresh, present-day vibe to it, it maintains, still, its historic roots. Throughout the halls and renovated rooms, visitors can still see traces of the school that used to inhabit the space. The gym floor remains exposed on the main level and, until recently, the school's auditorium was open for movies and shows.

The renovations are ongoing, but a few tenants have seen the building all the way through its transformation, including Studio 10. The studio's founder, Anne Bartlett, began renting a space from the Smiley in 2012, but she's been a part of the building for much longer.

"I went to Junior high here and although that wasn't necessarily the best time of my life, I love that now I can walk into this building and it's growing and changing and it's not stuck in the past. That's what I truly love about it; that it's constantly evolving and all this new energy is moving through it and there's new memories being made. There are layers of history and layers of memories that are present in this building," Bartlett said.



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She can still walk down the hallways and remember playing dodgeball in what once was the gym, but now she's transformed those memories into a studio space for practitioners of what she calls, embodied wisdom practices. It's a collective of people who want to practice things like yoga, tai chi, meditation, or dance, anything that has to do with bringing the body, the mind, and the spirit together. What a perfect fit for an entire building that seems to be doing just that.

Another long-term tenant, Durango Nature Studies, also has a history with the building. The nonprofit has been occupying one space or another for at least 15 years. It's true they've moved around the building once or twice, but they are seemingly there to stay.

The current Executive Director of Durango Nature Studies, Stephanie Weber, hasn't herself been a tenant for too long, but her junior high school was the Smiley's rival when she was a kid. Known back then as the Smiley Saints, the junior high may have fostered a few rivalries, but now it's a hodgepodge of different people from different walks of life working together in one big ecosystem.

**“On any given day, you have not only professionals doing some really amazing things, but you also have kids, families, and dogs. It is a community in and of itself. I’d say that the heart of Durango is kind of concentrated right here,”** Weber said.

Which generates a great breeding ground for creating community, making connections and sharing ideas to make a building come to life.

“The heart and soul of it is unlike any other building I’ve ever worked in,” Webster noted, sharing a sentiment that is agreed on by just about everyone who enters the Smiley.

Charles, who lives in the building with his family, refuses to ever call the building and his vision of it “finished”. There is frequently a faint hammering sound coming from some area of the building or another, and there are always people walking around carrying tools and large pieces of building material. Only Shaw knows what’s in the works, but he remains sly and secretive with the goings-on.

“Not that anything is a secret. It’s just more fun to do it that way and not have people asking me when everything is going to happen. What I like about it, and what I have fun with is that everyone here thinks it’s done and it’s not even close to being done,” Shaw said.

There is nothing that really needs to change about the building. In fact, if you asked anyone they would probably say it’s pretty great just the way it is. Even though Shaw and Bodwalk might have big plans for the future, for now they are simply happy to share a smile, right along with everyone else.

