

Interior designers in 'right place' on Main Street

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The architectural and interior design firm HDMS Inc. is right where it wants to be — on Main Street, on the cusp of a construction renaissance in North Little Rock.

And the team believes it has the skills and determination to take advantage of that position.

The decision to move to Main Street as that "right place," as partner Tim Dowty described it recently, wasn't difficult. He said it was an honor to be a part of the revitalization of Argenta, calling the businesses and people who paved the way "good ingredients" for its continued success.

The firm is at 409 Main St., in a storefront purchased by the four partners: Jan Bartlet-Hicks, 52, an interior designer and developer; Andrew McCauley, 41, an architect; Dowty, 42, an interior designer and construction coordinator; and Rachel Schell, 26, an interior designer and real estate agent.

"This company and this building and everything we've done is our résumé," Schell said. "People who walk in the door are looking at a piece of our portfolio."

Though Dowty said the firm's strength and passion are in renovating buildings, Schell added, "Don't get us wrong; we've got a ton of experience in new construction."

"We try and be a one-stop shop for a new developer, basically," Schell said. "A lot of people out there get ready to invest their money and they don't know how and they don't know where, and we've got enough experience on our team to walk them through it."

Potential customers can use HDMS's own building as an example of what they might expect from the firm.

Demolition of the interior began in August, and sometimes the team members found themselves working until midnight. Then they made a time- and money-consuming discovery — the floor had to be "saw-cut and jack hammered" for its entire 125-foot length so they could install new sewer and water connections, Dowty said. Even with this delay, the renovation came in under budget and ahead of schedule in 110 days, Schell said.

"Every renovation we've done and every project we've done, we're there at least once a week," Schell said. "But towards the end, when we get down to the crunch ... we're there every day."

When faced with renovating their own building and with a possible clash of four talented people and four different visions, did squabbles come up? In a moment reminiscent of a TV sitcom, a "no" from Dowty was overlapped by an "of course" from Schell, eliciting laughter from both.

The two did agree that the four partners are happy the project is done — now they can get busy helping clients.

"I'm just glad I can start wearing clean clothes again," Dowty said, smiling broadly.