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IN THE NEWS!

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Good as New

Renovations to the Polk County Courthouse have been finished. Staff will soon begin moving into the building.

Renovations to the Historic Polk County Courthouse are complete and personnel are ready to move into the downtown building that was originally built in 1859.

“I am pleased to move back into the courthouse,” said Clerk of Superior Court Charlene Owens, who along with District Attorney Jeff Hunt and staff will be moving into the courthouse offices July 17.

Owens said civil cases will most likely be heard in the courtroom again July 28. After that, the trial for Polk County Sheriff Chris Abril will be held in the renovated courtroom Aug. 4, almost two years from the day he was arrested on charges of rape during his campaign for sheriff.

Abril, 46, was arrested on Aug. 28, 2006, and charged with five counts of first-degree statutory rape and one count of first-degree sexual offense. Two months after his arrest, Abril, a Democrat, was elected sheriff, ousting two-term Republican incumbent David Satterfield.

It was about that time that reconstruction began.

The \$1.2 million renovation took about 1 1/2 years to complete, said Ryan Whitson, Polk County manager.

Many of the improvements can be seen from the outside, such as new shutters on energy-efficient storm windows, stuccoed front columns and the cupola that sits atop the courthouse.

But the most substantial change to the landmark is not what passers-by can see; the structural integrity on the first floor of the building has been greatly improved.

“I am very pleased how it turned out,” Whitson said about the architects and contractors who performed the renovations.



He added that it was cheaper to renovate than to build a new courthouse. The only real setback, Harris Architects pointed out earlier this year, was that there were unforeseen complications with a room on the first floor. But it is typical to encounter more deterioration than expected in restoration projects, according to the company.

Contractors lifted the floor and found structural damage set below the existing foundation. To fix the problem, they installed structural fortifications to the area that houses the mechanical room.

The courthouse was initially planned for renovations in 1999 under different contractors and architects, but their efforts were not adequate, Whitson said. Harris Architects said they had to primarily repair prior renovations.

Now that the job is finally finished, John Vining, chairman of the restoration committee, said it makes a difference to have competent companies like Harris Architects perform the renovations.

Despite the setback, Harris Architects was able to complete the job with only a one-month extension. Midwest Maintenance Inc. was the contracting company that completed the job last week. Progressive Contracting Company Inc. refurbished the aging cupola that now has a working bell in its tower, and Architect Cecil Cannon performed quality assurance for the project.

“We were blessed to have good architects and contractors,” Vining said.

“That really makes a difference.”

