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**Fresh face:  
Waynesboro  
factory Solutions  
Place gets a  
second life**



Photo: Norm Shafer



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12:24 p.m. Mar. 24,

2015

It's easy for a lobby to go nearly unnoticed; it's just a place to pass through or wait for a few minutes before moving on to the real destination. But for small startup companies, a lobby can be significant. "You don't necessarily want to spend a lot of money on a fancy lobby, but clients want it," said Rebecca Polan with Solutions Way Management.

Polan's company operates an office and warehouse facility in Waynesboro that rents space to a variety of small companies—everything from a regional printer to a company that makes parts for the aeronautics industry. The building, called Solutions Place, dates to the mid-1950s, when New York-based General Electric came to the region, bringing several thousand manufacturing jobs to what was then a primarily agricultural community.

GE's presence here was connected with big social changes. Its first local employees were all women. Later, a GE administrator publicly denounced Massive Resistance, helping to spur the desegregation of Virginia's public schools.

Yet the story ended less than happily, with environmental damage and the loss, by the 1980s, of many of the local jobs. The old GE building is now, under Polan's company, the center of a resurgence of sorts, with high-tech manufacturing and logistics firms coming to roost as tenants in Solutions Place.

"We try to offer our tenants a full basket of services," said Polan. Companies can access a fitness center, ample parking, a shared conference room—and the lobby, which provides a professional face even for companies who are just getting off the ground.

Charlottesville architects Hays + Ewing provided a master plan for the property (including flex space to be built in the future, plus open acres on which the local soccer club plans to build new fields). Chris Hays also helped design the lobby. "We reworked the entry and lobby space consistent with what we understand from original drawings," said Hays, pointing out that trying for historic tax credits dictated much of his firm's work.

Thus, some original midcentury details live on, while modern cork flooring and cabinetry update the space. What were once windows into an adjoining room, where GE displayed some of its products museum-style, are now cabinets highlighting the global reach of Solutions Place.

“We decided to make it a space where we welcome people from around the globe,” said Polan, pointing to the slogan “Welcome to Solutions Place” in a couple dozen different languages. Outside, Hays + Ewing restored the entry sequence. “There was parking right in front of the building,” said Hays, “so we tried to make a more gracious entry more consistent with the original plan.”

Polan is passionate about the second chance this place offers the community. “This is just one example of how you can take an old building and revitalize it,” she said.

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