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Synchrony gets a lift from new West Chester building

Originally in the Farmers and Mechanics building, it finds a new home in West Chester

By Brian McCullough, Daily Local News

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WEST CHESTER >> When Rod Hughes lost out on a plan to grow his company in one historic borough building, he regrouped.

With a vengeance.

Hughes' company, Synchrony Group, is comprised of an unusual blend of experts who are able to provide both scientific and marketing advice to companies in the pharmaceutical and medical device fields.

A former Cephalon executive who moved to the area to work with Frank Baldino, the founder of that company who has since passed away, Hughes started Synchrony in 2009 and occupied the second,

fifth and sixth floors of the historic Farmers and Mechanics building.

When that building became available, Hughes looked at it for Synchrony but it went to A. Thomas Myles IV and three partners.

[Click here to see a photo gallery of the refurbished building.](#)

“Our lease was up and they had different plans for the building, they wanted to make it a hotel,” Hughes said. “We had different plans for ourselves because we wanted a building where we could control our own destiny and where we could grow more. One of our highest priorities was to stay right in West Chester, as close to the downtown as we could because our people love it here.

“The other goal was to find a place that was fantastic, that we could make that could inspire collaboration, that could inspire creativity. We felt in order to do that, we needed to buy a building and renovate it ourselves.”

Hughes did not have to look far to find another building to meet his criteria. Synchrony recently opened at 22 N. Church St., about two blocks from the F&M Building.

“It’s a great space,” Hughes recently said as he pointed out the unique features of the historic property that had been a farmhouse during West Chester’s early years.

Hughes, the company’s founder, president and CEO, didn’t scrimp of Synchrony’s new home. After buying the building for \$1.1 million, he put another \$1 million into making it a unique setting for his employees.

It has high ceilings with exposed ductwork, brick walls, an open layout with glass-enclosed meeting spaces, a unique three-story staircase and the coup de grace, a hoist in a fourth-floor loft that once was used to get products to the upper floors.

Instead of walling off the areas where the hoist operated, Synchrony put in large windows to provide natural light throughout the building. Hughes plans to put in glass ceilings in the areas below the hoist so that it will be

visible from each floor.

According to Synchrony's research on the history of 22 N. Church St., the original farmhouse was converted from a barn and used as a residence in the early 1800s. In 1830, the property was purchased by Samson Babb, whose son of the same name served as the sheriff of Chester County from 1819 to 1822.

The building's first documented commercial use in 1847 was listed as "stove manufacturing and sales," during a time when West Chester was a factory town, agricultural marketplace and banking center. James Bros. Plumbing & Steam Fitting occupied the building beginning in 1880, and regularly used the gear-driven hoist system constructed in 1893 that is now a centerpiece of the office space.

The location was home to several other businesses – a dry goods store and a second-floor studio – but most notable was the J.J. Newberry "five and dime" store that operated out of the building for several decades in the early-to-mid 1900s.

"You can't work in this building and not be motivated by its history," Hughes said.

Hughes started Synchrony Group in 2007 and worked 80 hours a week to get it going.

It now has 40-plus full-time employees and around 30 independent contractors who work as needed.

Synchrony now is growing 20 percent to 30 percent a year, its founder said, "and we're not even trying ... it's all word of mouth."

Hughes was joined at Synchrony by another former Cephalon executive, Lynne Brookes, who worked as head of marketing there while Hughes was head of medicine.

"She has a chemistry degree from Yale," Hughes noted. "It's a rare combination (of skills) and it's one of the things that's made us a success. No one does exactly what we do."

Clients contact Synchrony either when their product is about to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration or when a product is struggling for some reason.

"We can tell you who to market it to," Hughes said. "Or sometimes I have to tell them, 'it's a dog.' We'll tell you exactly what we think instead of what we think you want to hear."

Now that employees are settling into the new building, Hughes said it is time for Synchrony to look for new horizons.

"Our primary goal for this last 12 to 18 months has been to move the new headquarters into West Chester," he said. "Our next goals are to open another place, either in New York City or just outside of New York City, and to establish a place on the West Coast because we have a lot of business on the West Coast."

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