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Ellensburg building wins preservation award

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Last month, the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, in conjunction with the state Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, announced the winners of the 2022 Excellence on Main Awards. These awards honor projects and individuals that have made a difference in their communities and helped revitalize downtown districts.

Among the awards is a Bricks and Mortar Rehabilitation category which recognizes building owners or projects that positively impact preservation efforts. Taking home the prize this year was the renovation and reimagining of the Geddis Building, a two-story, 30,000-square-foot brick and cast iron commercial building located in downtown Ellensburg's historic district.



Photo from Swenson Say Fagét [\[enlarge\]](#)

The refreshed building has seven ground level retail spaces and 17 rental units on its upper level.

The Geddis Building dates back to 1889 and is a rare intact example of western pioneer commercial architecture. It was built by Sylvanus Ray Geddis and replaced an almost identical building that the wealthy rancher had completed two years earlier. That property was destroyed in a fire in early 1889. Geddis quickly rebuilt the property, using fire-resistant materials such as iron columns and aluminum sheathing. In 1964 portions of the upper story were covered with additional aluminum sheathing that remains to this day.

Owner MJSS LLC purchased the property in 2015 from the city of Ellensburg with a vision of restoring and breathing new life into the building. Not long after purchase, MJSS spent \$400,000 on initial repairs and stabilization work that included the replacement of the roof, plumbing and electrical systems to restore the inside of the building to working condition. Commercial tenants moved in at that point.

The current renovation project, designed by architect Andrews & Andrews and built by general contractor Belsaas & Smith Construction, began in summer 2020 and consists of two phases. The goal is to restore the building's historic facade and features and to flip its upper levels to rental units. The upper levels were previously used as a hotel but have been vacant for years.

The first phase of renovations was completed in spring 2021. This focused



Photo by E. J. Hamacher, "Geddis Block" (1888) [\[enlarge\]](#)

on exteriors and repair of a belly band facade (by Pioneer Masonry Restoration Co.) and the replacement of a historic midband cornice (by Architectural Elements). Exterior unreinforced masonry walls were also repointed.

The original Geddis Building, pictured in 1888, before it was destroyed by fire in 1889.

Phase two, which is set to be completed by the end of year, will convert the abandoned hotel space into 17 high-end apartments in a mix of studio, one- and two-bedroom units. Each apartment will also have a small storage loft.

The Washington Trust for Historic Preservation commended the conversion and how it is being executed with an eye to preserving the original character and finishes of the building. The units have also been laid out to take advantage of an existing interior light well. Construction on phase two began in May 2021.

Additional project partners include Felix Plastering, interior and exterior finishes, and Swenson Say Fagét, structural engineer.

The 2022 Excellence on Main Awards are part of the Washington State Main Street Program which is operated by the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation in conjunction with the state Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. The program helps communities across the state revitalize the economy, appearance and image of their downtown districts.

Today, the Washington State Main Street Program encompasses a network of nearly 70 towns and cities across the state. More information on the program and the Excellence on Main Awards is at <https://preservewa.org/programs/mainstreet/>.

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