

By: Bob Melton
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A relatively new business in Holdenville is giving itself plenty of room to grow, and in the process is helping downtown Holdenville preserve a piece of its history.

Visual Lease Services, a local company that combines cartography, technology and information to assist property appraisals, is outgrowing its present location at 105 South Hinckley.

The company plans on restoring the Benson Building , located at the corner of Main and Oak, to its original 1925 glory and moving its high tech operations into the completed project.

Work on the historic building had already begun, with some new windows already in place. Once the building has new windows all the way around the new roof over head, to prevent the weather from intruding, it will be decided how to proceed from there.

Visual Lease Services co-founder Gary Mask says they will try to restore the 22,000 square foot building to as close to its original state as possible and still be functional for the business he plans to move in.

Visual Lease Services is a company that specializes in maps using its own Geographic Information Software, combined with Global Positioning Satellites and cartography to map out information that is useful in locating, identifying and assessing properties, especially oil and gas properties.

They have already completed mapping for 17 Oklahoma counties for this purpose, including Hughes County , and currently has a crew of eight working in Texas County .

VLS at the present time employs 23 people with skills in cartography, website design and software engineering. Mask hopes to not only continue the work they are now involved in, but to also expand to designing and even host websites. He also mentioned putting in a "internet café," a bank of high-speed connection Internet computers available to the public.

Mask says that some people have questioned why he doesn't relocate to Oklahoma City or even Dallas . He answers this with the fact that where he is located is irrelevant as long as he has a high speed internet connection, and he prefers living in Holdenville to the more crowded cities.

The Benson building originally opened on October 15, 1925 , and was considered to be one of the finest buildings of its size in the state, according to news articles from the time period.

The downstairs area housed five businesses plus the post office. Businesses on Grand Opening day included the Stamper Drug Company, Moore 's Ready to Wear, West's Cash store, Ideal Cash Grocery and Holland Brothers.

The second floor housed 23 suites of offices containing 52 offices rooms and was especially equipped for medical and dental professions. In fact, in later years it was referred to as the Medical Arts Building .

On opening day it housed Dr. R.H. Herring, dentist; Elliston, Shinn and Rives, insurance real estate; Dr. E.A. Jones, physician and surgeon; Dr. H.A. Howen, physician and surgeon, Riley and Adams insurance; Dr. W. H. New, chiropractor; E.R. Nix farm loans and oil royalties; William Jones, attorney; A Vorkees, Pryor, Stokes and Carver, attorneys and the Indian Territory Illuminating Oil Company.

Since that time the building has housed many other businesses, including Jimmy Rodgers, lawyer; Dr. Hicks, eye, nose and throat specialist; the draft board and Montgomery Wards mail order store, whose sign still hangs outside.

Many citizens have expressed a desire to see the historic building of Holdenville restored, and this latest project is hoped to inspire others to follow suit.