

Tompkins Chamber of Commerce - Ithaca, New York

Project: Renovation to 124 Brindley Street, Ithaca, NY. The project included an interior, exterior updates, and site restoration. Located in Ithaca's West End.

Construction Completion: November 2023

Client: Tompkins Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau

Architect: Holt Architects

Developer: CSP Management

Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau open new offices in West End

By [Geoff Preston](#) | *Tompkins Weekly* | January 25, 2023



Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau open new offices in West End. Photo by Casey Martin.

Moving from your home can be stressful and challenging, whether the new home is for your family or for your organization.

Although that was true at times for the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce and the Ithaca/Tompkins Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB), their ribbon-cutting and open house on Jan. 18 was a sweet celebration of one expansive family back under one roof. Both organizations play integral roles with local business and tourism partners, especially during the past nearly three years as the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc in our lives.

In 2021, the organizations sold the building at 904 East Shore Dr. from which they'd operated for 32 years. It's now been almost two months since they moved into their new offices at 124 Brindley St. in Ithaca's West End. The decision to move wasn't easy, but Tavares said the Chamber had outgrown the building it had owned and operated. As the size of the staff grew, the size of the building did not, even after a renovation.

The decision to sell the building was announced in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there were challenges in getting the building ready, Chamber President Jennifer Tavares said the new space has started to feel like home.

"It's gone well. The process took a little longer than we had planned or hoped, like with so many projects there were supply-chain challenges," she said. "We've been in our space for almost two months now, we're working on getting settled. People are customizing, decorating their spaces and getting comfortable in their new home. I think we're generally very happy with it."

The annual cost difference between owning the former building and leasing the current building is minimal, according to Tavares. The difference is the staff assets in managing and upgrading the property, which also made moving desirable.

"We were spending a lot of time and resources annually on managing the building itself, and frankly that building didn't suit our needs any longer," she said. "We couldn't properly fit our staff in it. We didn't have enough office space for everyone."

"In terms of our overall financial strength as an organization, we're in a much stronger place because previously our only real asset was a building, and now we're able to be a little more strategic in how we use our resources and assets because they are now a bit more liquid."



Owner's Representative Sara Hayes of Hayes Strategy (left), with Cindy Kaufman of Holt Architects (center) and Jerry Dietz of CSP Management (right).



Previous board chair, Jeff Mattison from TST BOCES (left), with current board chair, Kelli Cartmill, addressing gathering at the ribbon cutting ceremony on January 18th. Photo by Casey Martin

The Brindley Street building sits at 7,200 square feet, and the location will allow the Chamber and the CVB to better serve more of their constituents and satellite locations, Tavares said.

“The location [of the East Shore Drive property] is beautiful. We had a lake view,” she said. “It was convenient in a lot of ways to certain areas of the community, but being over here in the West End, we are still central to a lot of Tompkins County, but we are closer to a lot of areas and business. We’re closer to the heart of the Ithaca community.”

She said they are also closer to Trumansburg, Ulysses and the Visitor Center at the Taughannock Falls overlook.

The overlook center is one of three locations the Chamber operates. The third location is the Downtown Visitor Center at 110 North Tioga St. in Ithaca.

Tavares said that the Chamber and the CVB are membership-based organizations that aim to promote commerce and advocate for those organizations.

“We focus on creating and offering networking opportunities and helping people find customers and the resources they need,” she said. “We have been focusing on advocacy and key issues that businesses tell us are most important to them, such as housing and workforce development, infrastructure, transportation and rural business needs. Ithaca is the biggest part of our local economy here, but we have a lot of wonderful businesses and organizations in our rural landscape. Those organizations are just as important to us.”

She said the CVB looks to increase visibility to the Ithaca and county community in three ways: enhancing visitors’ experience when they are here, marketing to put the community on the map and a sales department that hopes to attract visitors to the county by attracting bus tours, weddings and the under-construction convention center.

Building owner and developer Jerry Dietz, whose company is CSP Management, is a long-time member of the Chamber and has served on the board of directors, including a term as president.

Dietz purchased the building at 124 Brindley St. in 2019. When the Chamber decided it was looking to move, he thought his property and the Chamber's needs would be a perfect fit.

"I've recognized for a long time the tremendous value they bring to the community. It's a great pleasure for me to welcome them," he said. "They will be a wonderful anchor tenant to the transformation that's going to be happening in that neighborhood for the next five years or so. They made a real statement by moving there."

Dietz said that the West End has seen multi-use development and should see more in the coming years. Tavares said that the Chamber also saw how the neighborhood is being developed and was excited about the possibility of what it could become.

"As we look into the future and look at the next five to 10 years about what's coming to this end of town, there are things happening down here already," she said. "I think it's a really neat part of town, and there's a diverse mix of businesses down here. We have a lot more neighbors than we had in our old location. We're excited about how this is going to develop in the next several years."

Dietz said he wanted to design the building to reflect what the Chamber wanted and needed in a building.

The Chamber hired its own architects from Holt Architects to design the building. Dietz said the firm put together a great plan that fit what the Chamber needed.

"It was really built for them," he said. "When I was wooing them, and there were many landlords trying to get them to move into vacant spaces that they had, I gave them the opportunity to create the space they wanted."

Holt Architects Principal Cindy Kaufman said that the Chamber staff was very involved in the design process and created the perfect space for what they needed.

"Jennifer Tavares and her team worked extremely hard to ensure that the design of the workspace met all of the programmatic and staff needs, creating a 'home away from home' for comfort, inspiration as well as a welcoming environment for all who visit the building," Kaufman said.

Dietz has many tenants, but he said having the Chamber and CVB means a lot to him because of the work the organizations do to serve businesses in Ithaca and the county.

"This is the way I love to do business, these win-win situations," he said. "In many ways, the Chamber has long been the unsung hero of what drives business in our community. They don't get enough credit for what they offer, the networking opportunities that they offer, the educational opportunities that they offer. I didn't know until I joined the board how much of an advocate they are for local business people, whether you're a member of the chamber or not."