

Greenwood Trades Building:

Woodworking Shop and Commercial Space in a Customized, Metal-clad Building

by Randall Arendt

Location: Greenwood Road, Brunswick, Maine

Development Period: 2002-03

Engineers: Sitalines P.A., Brunswick, Maine

General Contractor: R. C. Theberge, Brunswick, Maine

Developers: Eric Koehler and Robert Theberge, Brunswick, Maine

Located along a semi-rural road in front of one of the town's industrial parks (which lies behind it), the Greenwood Trades Building is an outstanding example of what can be accomplished when a businessman with a background in architectural design works with a large manufacturer of metal buildings.

This project came about when Eric Koehler, a local woodworker in Brunswick Maine (population 20,600), teamed up with general contractor Robert Theberge, to create space for their two growing businesses, plus additional rental space for other small firms. The pair, who had a shared vision for the project, approached the Brunswick Development Corporation, asking to buy the land from them, as it was isolated from the BDC's industrial park by wooded wetlands that could not be developed or even crossed by an access road. They then contacted the Morton Building company, an Illinois-based provider of quality metal buildings primarily for commercial, agricultural equestrian, and municipal uses, to customize a design for their wood-framed, metal-clad building. They worked with Morton to select exterior materials, colors, and building elements that would fulfill Koehler and Theberge's desire to create something that the neighbors could not only live with, but would actually like, even though their property was not subject to any special building design standards set by the town. Although the two partners worked closely together and were co-equals on the project, Koehler deferred to Theberge – with his contracting experience – to execute much of the building construction and site work.



Figure 1. This photo shows the western end of the building with one of its two gabled front entranceways and one of its three trellises covered with hydrangea vines.

The planning department staff and planning board received their application enthusiastically, not only because the project would expand local employment and was consistent with the zoning, but also because it was clearly designed to fit comfortably into the neighborhood, including a large house directly opposite.

The 10,300 square foot building features a brownish red metal pitched roof with a 4/12 slope, beige metal-clad walls, and two large gables, one over each of the building's two front entrances. In an inspired touch, Koehler added large wooden trellises (about 22 feet long and eight feet deep) on each side of the twin gables and another one between them. Planted with hydrangea vines that are in leaf from early May through October, and which flower profusely in June, the three trellises and their lush vines have completely transformed this nicely proportioned structure, making it perhaps the most attractive light industrial building in the state.

Adding to the traditional streetscape are six maple trees planted 40 feet on center in a grassy landscaped strip, which have matured nicely and help to buffer the small front parking area. The western end of the property, adjoining an existing residence, has been thickly planted with white pines to create visual screening.

Additional parking and outdoor material storage are provided at the rear, where there are several delivery bays. Koehler has broadened his business to include the assembly of large plastic septic tanks that are engineered to purify wastewater on environmentally-challenging sites. As of 2018, about one-third of the building is occupied by a supplier of metal fasteners and related tools. Located beyond municipal water and sewer lines, the building is served by on-lot septic and a well.



Figure 2. The central trellis shown above is “book-ended” by the building’s two front entranceways. Branches from two of the six maple trees planted along Greenwood Road frame the picture. Parking lot stormwater flows across a

grassy strip to a rock-filled detention area where it infiltrates through the soil which filters it and removes contaminants.



Figure 3. This before-and-after pair shows the original farmhouse (which had reached a state of advanced deterioration when the property was purchased) and the newly-constructed light industrial building, with its gabled entrances and the middle trellis, shortly after the vines were planted. (Photos by Eric Koehler)