

O'Connor Connective: Focused on advancing women in business, The Connective Opens on Main Avenue in Historic Downtown De Pere

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The versatile professional office building is an initiative by O'Connor Connective to create a place for women to work, learn and collaborate.

DE PERE, Wis. — As one of more than 70 women-owned businesses in the City of De Pere's Business Improvement District, O'Connor Connective is a prime example of how important location and community support is to growth. Today, O'Connor Connective and its founder, Bridget O'Connor, seek to expand what's available for women in business by starting a collaborative professional office building catering to the needs of female entrepreneurs—in the heart of historic downtown De Pere.

"At our core, O'Connor Connective focuses on helping create strategy through communications," said O'Connor, who bought and renovated a 102-year-old building in 2014 to house her company. "What's really interesting is that research is showing us that women entrepreneurs are leveraging downtown Main Streets as a catalyst for their business strategy."

Now, O'Connor has purchased a 10,000-square-foot professional office building, newly named The Connective, located at 320 Main Ave. on the west side of De Pere. The building is next to Luna Café and across the street from O'Connor Connective and The Exchange — an emerging area that is home to an eclectic mix of businesses, restaurants and shopping. The Connective offers individual offices

within shared suites to give a sense of community provided by co-working environments, yet privacy to advance independent business needs. Individual contractors, consultants and freelancers dissatisfied with the loneliness of working from home or seeking to gain more visibility are ideal candidates for The Connective.

"We are especially interested in those who offer services that could help advance small and family business, such as legal, HR or IT consultants," O'Connor said. "Combined with our ability to offer marketing, communications and strategic planning services, we'd like to see it become a hub to benefit those who work in this space as well as those who could benefit from shared expertise."

According to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), women entrepreneurs are drawn to historic downtowns. In a 2016 survey of 27 Wisconsin Main Street communities, 39 percent of all businesses were owned by women.

"I didn't know before I selected De Pere as my business location that there are dozens and dozens of women business owners here. But there isn't something just for us that formally

offers an opportunity to engage, exchange ideas that are unique to our experiences or to help us lift one another up," O'Connor said. "I'd like to see more available — so we are putting our company's efforts behind what we feel will only make our community stronger."

No stranger to starting new endeavors, O'Connor left a vice presidential position at St. Norbert College in De Pere in 2013 to take a chance on starting her own consulting business. In 2015, O'Connor Connective received the Greater Green Bay Chamber Entrepreneurial Award. In 2018, after making strides in advancing clients, growing the company and collaborating with business neighbors to improve downtown De Pere, O'Connor was named the Greater Green Bay Chamber's Business Person of the Year. Now, she feels her company is in a position to do more.

"It would be really exciting to also extend programming and mentorship for women seeking corporate advancement and C-suite positions, as well as those choosing to run their own businesses," O'Connor said.

To that end, O'Connor Connective has engaged with the Donald J. Schneider School of Business & Economics at St. Norbert College to identify the needs of women in

business in the region. With that information will come intentional conversations around how to best meet the needs of women — and men — in further building a diverse executive leadership population in our region. Much work is already being done regionally, such as the collaboration between the Greater Green Bay Chamber and the Greater Green Bay Community Foundation in advancing the CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion.

“We seek to build on what’s going on. This is a particular step our company can take. Over time, we hope The Connective will be a meaningful place that partners with public and private groups to further advance women in business. We don’t seek to be the only — but one of,” O’Connor said. “We want to not just be part of the conversation, we want to roll up our sleeves and make an impact.”

To learn more about the collaborative work spaces and private offices available within The Connective, call (920) 288-2980. Organizations or individuals seeking to partner with O’Connor Connective to further promote or make available programming for women in business also are encouraged to contact O’Connor Connective.