

Itu Nov 12/02 p. 3

By Henry Bury
THE INTELLIGENCER

The oldest house in Belleville is now home to future planning activity in the city.

Ainley Group, Consulting Engineers and Planners, has purchased and moved its Belleville office into the historical MacIntosh-Ridley House at 45 South Front St. The house was built circa 1817 and was on the demolition block in the early 1980s before the historical community rallied to restore the structure.

The two urban planners, a professional engineer and technical and support staff have been conducting business from the two-storey, 3,600 square foot home since early October.

An open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony were held Thursday afternoon and dignitaries included company officials from its three other offices in Collingwood, Barrie and Ottawa as well as representatives of local historical groups.

William Ainley, chairman of Ainley Group, said his company purchased the building earlier this year from Peter Morch and completed extensive renovations to the interior.

"We are pleased to take on the stewardship of this fine piece of early Belleville history," he said.

Ainley Group employs more than 90 people in Ontario, including almost 10 at the Belleville office. It is a well-established planning and engineering consulting firm which has served municipal and private sector clients throughout Ontario for the past 40 years.

The Belleville office has been meeting the development and municipal engineering and planning needs of the Quinte region for almost 30 years.

Ainley said his company had always rented office space in Belleville — its last location was the Jamieson Bone building at 157 Front St. — until a decision was made earlier this year to purchase a building somewhere in the city.

"We looked at four or five buildings in Belleville and when we saw

this one, we realized it was the one we wanted," he said.

There was a good reason for selecting the MacIntosh-Ridley House that boasts several offices, a small library, large board room and rental space.

"We have three other buildings and they're all modern box office-type buildings. The idea came that this (MacIntosh-Ridley House) would be different. We do a lot of planning here and so we felt it would just be right," said Ainley.

Coun. Kay Manderville was thrilled with Ainley Group's decision to buy and move its city operation into the historical home.

"I am told this is the oldest house in Belleville and so I'm really pleased that this is active and alive and well looked after and a part of our community," she said.

Manderville said Thursday's ceremony was even more special considering the house was almost demolished in the early 1980s after it fell into disrepair.

The house was constructed around 1817 by Martha MacIntosh, widow of Capt. John MacIntosh who drowned in the Bay of Quinte in 1815.

Dr. George Ridley purchased the home from MacIntosh and her new husband, Donald McLellan, in 1829.

The Ridleys sold the home in 1900 and it has had many owners since.

At one time in the 1930s, the house served as the factory for E.F. Dickens and Son, bakers and confectioners.

The Mackenzie family purchased the property in 1937 and

became known as the Mackenzie Feed Building until the 1970s.

The house was empty for about 20 years and fell into disrepair and Manderville recalled how there was plenty of discussion around demolishing the structure in the early 1980s.

"The historical society and other interested parties got together and put forth a big effort to get this house renovated on the outside and save it. And they did. And the nice part now is that the Ainley Group is coming in here...and it will commemorate the old activity that was here years ago with MacIntosh and Ridley," Manderville said.

Belleville City Council designated the house in 1983 as a building of historical and architectural interest.