

Pop goes the office art



Lawyer's digs awash in cultural jests, color

By MARK CYBULSKI
Staff Writer

NORTHAMPTON — Alan R. Goodman is trying to do what some may view as impossible: make it fun to see a lawyer.

Goodman, a Springfield attorney, is expanding into Hampshire County with a decorative splash. His new office in the plaza at 34 Bridge St. has piqued the curiosity of just about all who walk by. It opens Wednesday.

Goodman has bypassed the traditional mahogany reception desk and staid office furniture.

Instead, there's a tire-shaped reception desk, colliding model cars, traffic lights, road signs and a wall of bright orange road cones.

"Not always in law do you get to exercise the creative side of your brain," said Goodman.

Goodman says the idea behind the office is to create an environment that's fun to be in, as well as brighten people's moods when times are bad — as they sometimes are when they have to hire a lawyer.

Though bursting with novelty, the office comes with risk. Some question whether Goodman's bright, cartoon-like atmosphere will attract customers, or turn them away.

"I can imagine it working both ways," said Ray Kinoshita, a professor of architecture and interior design at the University of Massachusetts. "Maybe he's trying to say there's a bright side to every story. But if (prospective clients) get upset about what happened to them by what they see in there, it could backfire."

Astroturf, car crashes

Two words best describe a glance into Goodman's office: sensory overload.

Take a step inside, and it's not carpet you feel under your feet. It's Astroturf. Customers will be greeted by Goodman's receptionist, seated behind a desk made out of half of a giant off-road tire.

Since personal injury cases comprise 100 percent of Goodman's work, the distinct theme of choice is auto accidents. Two mini cars are positioned on a V-shaped track on the ceiling. Place your hand on a button in the front window, and they go into motion and crash into each other.

The front wall of the building is lined with dozens of orange road cones, while four street lights adorn the conference room. A mural of dolls in the likeness of Barbie and Ken riding a convertible with the logos "Justice Served Daily" and "Justice Was Served" are on each wall.

And the neon, pressure and heat sen-

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Goodman

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sitive sign above the office entrance in the plaza simply reads "Goodman!"

Cost was high

Goodman designed the office with designers Johnny Swing from Brookline, Vt., and John Carter of New York City. Kohl Construction of Hadley did the interior work. Goodman declined to reveal what his new quarters cost him, but said it was "considerable."

"It ran way over cost," he said. "But I thought it was important to have."

Swing said he and Carter, who have collaborated on about seven projects in the past 12 years, worked on Goodman's Springfield office two years ago, where the theme is similar but more spread out through the workplace.

"This time, he decided to go even further," Swing said.

Many of the materials that adorn the office — the tires, rusty road signs — come from a junkyard owned by Goodman's late father, Abraham Goodman, who used to run a recycling business in Ware.

Goodman says he hopes the look of the office will provide "a little whimsical fun" for clients when they come to his office for business.

"Too many lawyers' offices are too stuffy," he said. "We're trying to say that we're not stuffy. This helps tell people who I am and whether they want to hire me."

The high-concept office is just

Goodman's expansion into Hampshire County is a homecoming of sorts. He was raised in Ware and graduated from Amherst College. He was also the former consumer advocate under former city Mayor Sean Dunphy in the 1970s.

one of Goodman's many marketing methods. Along with his office, Goodman is well known for his flashy ads on Springfield TV. His latest features the attorney knocking out a boxing opponent with a toy boxing game.

His is also the only business that advertises on the back of the Bell Atlantic phone book, giving him a distinct advantage over other lawyers listed inside.

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Goodman, who lives in Longmeadow, said he is opening the office in Northampton because he has been spending more and more time doing business in the Hampshire County courthouse. A receptionist will be there all day, while he expects to hold office hours there two days a week.

"It's a place to hang my hat," he said of his new quarters.

A need for marketing

William Litant, a spokesman for

the Massachusetts Bar Association in Boston, says Goodman's new office falls in line with the trend of lawyers becoming more concerned with marketing themselves.

Litant said about 10 years ago, members of the MBA were trying to get the organization to improve the image of attorneys by getting more pro bono work. Now, with a glut of lawyers in the market, they are looking for advice on how to run a profitable practice.

"Now, the number one thing we hear from people is 'Help us run our business. Help us be competitive,'" Litant said. "They aren't taught any of that stuff in law school."

However, Litant said that Goodman's office concept may turn off some potential clients, if they see it as "too offbeat."

If someone has a serious legal matter and needs an attorney, they may opt to go with one who has a more conservative appearance, he reasons.

That's the view of some who have gotten a glimpse into his office.

Sarah Kelly, a mortgage officer at the United Bank branch located

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RISHA HESS

Not your typical law office

Attorney Alan R. Goodman sits beside one of the unusual furnishings in his new Northampton law office. The Springfield attorney is expanding into Hampshire County with a decorative splash. His new space is a carnival of pop images, prompting some to ask: Is this really a law office? Story and photos, Page 15.

Police aim to combat



Attorney Alan R. Goodman stands in his new law office in Northampton, a place festooned with pop art references to law and personal injury. His bold statements are drawing notice, but some question whether they go too far in a conservative profession.



RISHA HESS

The tire brand of Goodyear became Goodman for the designers who created this table, now in a lawyer's new Bridge Street office in Northampton.



RISHA HESS

The model cars on the ceiling of Goodman's new office can be set in motion by touching a button. They then crash. At left are a bank of plastic cones.

Oohs, aahs and head-scratching outside office

By MARK CYBULSKI
Staff Writer

NORTHAMPTON — Whether it attracts customers or not, Alan R. Goodman's law office has succeeded in creating a buzz in Northampton.

"That would be the understatement of the year," says Mikki Mishon, an orthotics specialist at McClelland Home Health Pharmacy, one of Goodman's neighbors in the 34 Bridge St. plaza.

Word about the odd decorative innovations under way in Goodman's offices has drawn people to stop by to get a look. There's no sign outside advertising it as

a law office, so its function has been a mystery to many.

Mishon said there are finger- and noseprints all over the glass front door of the office, left by curious passers-by looking to get a gander at what's inside.

"Everybody wonders what it is," Mishon said. "When they hear it's a lawyer's office, they just shake their heads."

David Kerr of Amherst said he's been stopping in the plaza regularly for no reason but to see if it was open yet, so he could find out what it is.

When he stopped by this week and a reporter told him it was a law office, Kerr was in shock.

"I guess this is where neon came to die," he said. "I love it. It staggers the imagination."

Kerr said he could understand why the high-concept design could turn off some people.

"It could cut both ways," Kerr said. "It could terrify them or, they could think 'I can really talk to this guy.'"

Kerr thinks he could talk to him. "I love it," he said, peering through the window. "Anything that makes lawyers less corporate is a good thing."

Sarah Kelly, a mortgage officer at United Bank, located right next to the office, said many people passing the law offices first

think it must be the home of an arcade. "It's definitely out of the ordinary," Kelly said.

Alana Craig, a shift leader at Kinko's Copies, said it's not unusual for a dozen people to come in during her shift and ask if Kinko's workers know what the office is for.

"Someone asked if he does comic book defense law," Craig said.

Nancy Sachs of Amherst, who was getting copies made at Kinko's, said she couldn't believe it was a law office.

"I thought it was some kind of store for high-tech merchandise, or a skate shop," Sachs said.