



HISTORIC PRITZLAFF BUILDING REPURPOSED INTO POPULAR EVENT VENUE WITH ASSIST FROM PFLOW HYDRAULIC VRCS

EVENT VENUE | MILWAUKEE, WI

It is becoming common for historic urban buildings to extend their useful lives by being repurposed into something far different than that for which they were originally designed.

The REI flagship store in Denver is housed in an old streetcar powerhouse, and the sprawling Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art is creatively configured into a once condemned electrical components factory. The Montreal Forum, the most storied building in hockey, is now a mall with movie theaters, shops and restaurants.

The historically designated Pritzlaff Building on the southern edge of downtown Milwaukee has undergone several similar transformations. Built in 1875, the Victorian era building was originally a hardware wholesaler employing up to 450 people at the peak of its near 100 year run, and then spent another 30 years as a furniture store.

Acquired by Sunset Investors, a local development firm, in 2005, the building has undergone a virtual Renaissance. The 26,000 square foot ground floor with arched windows, exposed cream city brick walls and industrial age beamed ceilings has been converted into one of the most popular event venues in the city.

The two large ballrooms and two banquet rooms are frequently booked for wedding receptions, private parties, fund raisers, artistic performances, and even, recently, the annual "State of the City" speech by Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett. The building's upper floors consist of a mixture of over 100 upscale offices and apartments.

INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES

The infrastructure upgrades required to start and grow an event business in a 140+ year old building are significant. In addition to the numerous food, beverage and hospitality related improvements that were completed before Pritzlaff Events opened for business; it became clear over a short period of time that there were other building upgrades needed to support an increased volume of event bookings.

In the first few years Pritzlaff moved the varying array of chairs, tables, props and other supplies for each event from the basement storage area to the main floor via a cramped, obsolete freight elevator. Most materials had to be taken off their transport carts to fit in the elevator, causing delays in the set-up and tear-down for each event that became difficult to absorb as the business grew.

Don Hooge, the Sunset Investors construction manager who oversees all renovations to the Pritzlaff Building, was charged with finding a better lifting method.

"We looked at several different options, but nobody had a standard lift that would perfectly suit our needs," said Hooge. "There were some difficult challenges presented by the age of the building and the confined spaces in the area where the lift would be installed.

Global Industrial, a material handling products provider in the Milwaukee area, suggested that Hooge consult with PFlow Industries, a leading manufacturing of vertical lifts, also known as Vertical Reciprocating Conveyors (VRCs).

After an initial on-site consultation, PFlow responded with the specification of a 21 Series hydraulic lift, with a carriage platform of a 8'-0" wide x 8'-6" long with a 7'-0" clear height, big enough to accommodate all event supplies and their transport carts.

INSTALLATION CHALLENGES

Once the lift was specified there were several significant installation challenges the older building presented that required some creative problem solving.

"The first issue we had was getting the lift in the building. There were no exterior doors big enough for the lift carriage," said Sandy Silverberg, the Global Industrial manager of the project, including installation. "So PFlow built the carriage in two pieces, and then we bolted and welded it together onsite."

Once the VRC was inside and ready for placement, a temporary hoist was needed to place the components of the lift through its ground floor opening. A temporary steel I-beam was placed on the office floor directly above to attach the hoist. The hole made in the second floor office was quickly repaired once the lift was in place, and the hoist and I-beam removed.

Other issues were surmounted without too much difficulty, including adjusting the platform installation to compensate for the uneven basement floor, and using metal plates to brace the lift to the aging adjacent wood beams and brick walls.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HYDRAULIC LIFT TECHNOLOGY

Installed in July 2015, the VRC features a 2,000 lb capacity and moves loads between the basement and first floor. All carts can be manually placed and removed from the lift. A staircase was built next to the lift for Pritzlaff staff members to follow the loads up and down.

"I was amazed at how fast and easily it went in. For this building and its age, the process went very smoothly."

**Don Hooge,
Construction Manager,
Sunset Investors**





The carriage is lifted and lowered by two hydraulic cylinders, mounted on the guide columns that straddle the carriage. The hydraulic technology provides cost-effective durability, allowing the lifts to operate continuously throughout the day, with installation costs and maintenance needs less than other lifting technologies.

“The lift will be used non-stop for at least two to three days every week during peak season,” said Hooge.

Hydraulic lifts are ideal for applications with lift loads up to 6,000 lb, carriage sizes to 10' x 10', and vertical rises to 22'.

SAFETY FEATURES

For fire safety the VRC penetrates through a one-hour fire-rated floor, with the lower level enclosed with one-hour fire-rated doors and walls. PFlow hydraulic VRCs also include advanced safety features to protect workers and materials, such as:

Access gates at each level with interlocks to sync with the movement and position of the lift carriage.

A torsion bar links the two hydraulic cylinders to equalize the load and ensures the carriage remains level at all times.

A SECOND LIFT

PFlow and Global Industrial will soon install a second hydraulic VRC in another area of the Pritzlaff building complex. This smaller lift will be used to serve a new catering kitchen that is being built, in addition to moving supplies for smaller events in adjacent areas of the building. There is a passageway in the basement between the two lifts that allow for common storage of all supplies.

VRCs move materials, but not people, between multiple levels in factories, warehouses, institutions or anywhere that products or supplies need to move from one level to another. They have their own national code (ANSI/ASME B20.1) and are specifically exempt from the national elevator code.