

It's all inside: Cummings Center is a city within the city

By Martina Brendel

BEVERLY - There's one place in Beverly where you can learn to dance, buy life insurance and get your teeth cleaned, all without leaving the building.

The Cummings Center, an office complex housed inside the former United Shoe Machinery factory, has evolved over the years into a veritable city within a city, with restaurants, doctor's offices and schools springing up alongside the more predictable manufacturing, law and biotech firms. Few people realize how many businesses are located at the Cummings Center until they step inside.

"There's so much here. You don't know it because they don't have a sign out front that details it," said Chip Mitchell, pastor of the Boston Church of Christ, which has called the Cummings Center home since 1997.

Like many of the early tenants, the church was lured to the Cummings Center by its competitive rents - only \$3.50 per square foot at the time. (The standard rate today is \$14.95 per square foot.) In addition to Sunday services, the church hosts weddings, Sweet 16 parties and Monday Night Football gatherings.

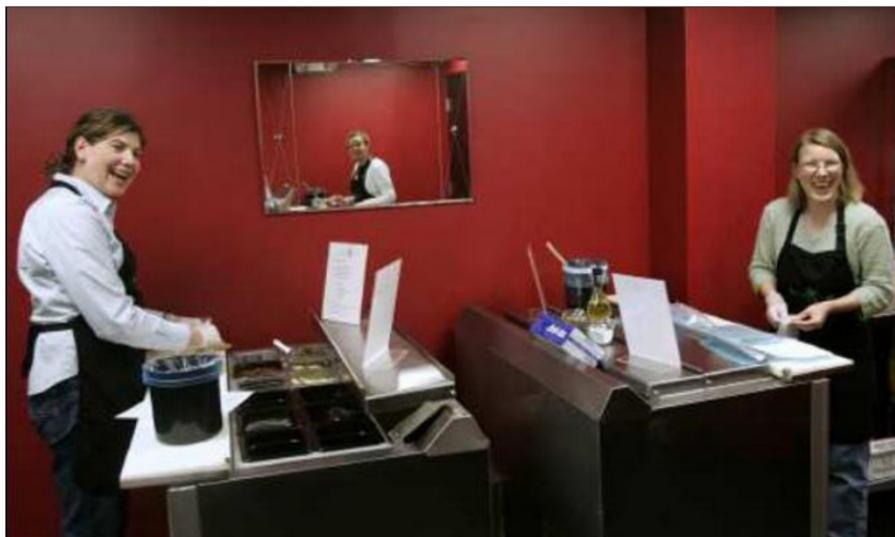
Another longtime tenant, American & Shoen Machinery Co., actually continues to make the machines that make shoes. The German-owned company got its start in 1971 at the Cummings Center when it was still "The Shoe," following an anti-trust lawsuit against USM. It continued to bounce around the North Shore for several years before returning to Beverly in 1996.

"When we found our way back into the Cummings Center, it was like coming full circle," said Ed Skoniecki, president of American & Shoen.

As more companies moved into the Cummings Center, it began to attract service-oriented businesses such as bagel shops, dry cleaners, printers and shipping companies.

"I chose the Cummings Center because there's 3,500 people right over my head," said Karen Andrew, owner of Buying Thyme, a shop where customers can order or prepare meals to take home and cook.

Liza Indiciani, who runs a dance studio at the Cummings Center, said she was attracted to it because it offered



Buying Thyme: Meal preparation service **Opened:** December 2005 **Quote:** "I chose the Cummings Center because there's 3,500 people right over my head." - Karen Andrew, owner

services that parents could take advantage of while waiting to pick up their kids.

"I liked personally the fact that it's a community within a community," she said. "There was just so much to offer to the people that were going to be my clients."

History repeats itself

When Bill Cummings, the founder of Cummings Properties, bought the United Shoe factory in 1996, it was in sad shape. Empty and aging, The Shoe went through \$80 million in renovations before it became usable office space.

In its heyday, however, the United Shoe Machinery Corp. bore many similarities to the office park it is today. The largest reinforced concrete structure in the world when it was built in 1903, The Shoe was considered a state-of-the-art facility. At one point, it employed 5,000 people - 1,000 more than the Cummings Center houses today.

"When it was built, there wasn't a whole lot of support infrastructure, so it tried to be everything," said Beverly Mayor William Scanlon, who was president of the United Shoe Machinery Group from 1982 to 1986.

The Shoe generated its own electricity by heating water from the nearby man-made ponds. Employees dined in a cafeteria that seated 500, received medical attention from an in-house doctor and played golf at the company's country club - now the Beverly Golf & Tennis Club.

"I think the management at the United Shoe at the time had a similar way of looking at things to the way we look at things," said Cummings, "in terms of building a company where people wanted to work and stay at the same time."

Today, the Cummings Center seems to offer a business for every life necessity, from child care to hospice care. The office park boasts four restaurants, more than 50 doctor's offices, dozens of lawyers, accountants and real estate brokers, and two schools - not including the McKeown School, a public elementary school that sits on land donated by the Cummings Center.

About the only thing the Cummings Center doesn't offer is a place to sleep, though the company is working on that. It has obtained permission from local boards to open a hotel and is awaiting approval from the state.

Undreamed of success

The growth of the office park has exceeded even Cummings' expectations.

"When we started out here, we didn't have any idea in the world how much would take place," he said. "We certainly didn't envision what's there now or anything as comprehensive and substantive as what it turned out to be."

Last year, the Cummings Center paid the city \$883,382 in taxes - making it Beverly's largest taxpayer.

Sometimes, even Cummings is surprised by the businesses that want to move into his office park.

Commenting on the "Office Bark," a dog day-care and grooming business that opened last month, Cummings said, "That surprised us more than any other one. Not being a dog owner, I was not aware that people needed to think about those things."

"Frankly, now a veterinarian is interested in being located near the new doggie day care," he said.

A Sampling of Cummings Center Businesses



Boston Church of Christ
What it is: Nondenominational church
Opened: May 1997
Quote: "We were one of the first tenants. The Cummings Center was offering aggressive, discounted pricing at that time." - Chip Mitchell, pastor



Liza Indiciani Studio of Dance
What it is: Dance studio
Opened: August 2004
Quote: "I liked personally the fact that it's a community within a community." - Liza Indiciani, owner



Institute for Corporate Training & Technology
What it is: Corporate training and noncredit classes run by North Shore Community College
Opened: October 1999
Quote: "It's very good to have a really corporate presence." - Diane Palter Gill, dean



American & Schoen Machinery Co.
What it is: Manufacturer of shoe machinery and shoe components
Opened: September 1996
Quote: "When we found our way back into the Cummings Center, it was like coming full circle." - Ed Skoniecki, president