The lure of light

The right lighting lends a sense of comfort, familiarity to the heart of a city

By Sean Kivist

Mike Leonardo has vivid memories of a yuletide stroll during his boyhood in Syracuse. Every winter, on Christmas Eve, his relatives would gather at the home of an aunt. By the time they left, it would be dark in the city, and Leonardo’s father would go a little out of his way and take his family on a ride through downtown.

Dozens of buildings would be illuminated, glittering with colored lights. For a child looking out a car window, it created an unforgettable atmosphere of warmth and community. Decades later, Leonardo is glad for the chance to be part of regaining at least a touch of the same feeling.

Key Bank has added colorful new LED lighting to the exterior of its landmark bank at Warren and Washington streets, a building that serves as the bank’s Central New York district headquarters. Leonardo, a vice president and regional facilities manager for Key Bank, said the project, in its early stages, focused on discovering the most efficient kind of exterior lighting.

Theodore Myres, a bank spokeswoman, said KeyBank’s lead corporate real estate analyst for Key Bank in Syracuse, said that company responded with some striking options — including a decorative exterior lighting scheme, now in operation, that involves at least 45 potential variations in color.

If I noticed those lights while walking to my parked car, and last Thursday night I met Leonardo and Turner at their building. They pointed out how the new lights illuminate the detailed ceramic — replete with lion’s heads — atop all three walls that face city streets. The lights also illuminate an entire eastern wall, visible from City Hall, Washington Street and from an adjoining parking lot where the old Yates Hotel once stood.

We stayed outside and watched as Turner, in the bank, displayed a few options. There was red, green and white, in honor of Columbus Day. And orange and blue that can be used when Syracuse University has a big game. There were many shadings of red, the official Key Bank color. Red and green will be primary colors for the yuletide, while solid greens will be turned on for St. Patrick’s Day.

There was even a pattern of dark pinstripes that Leonardo opined Turner described as their “New York Yankees colors.” “This has been a lot of fun,” Leonardo said.

The place is already an extraordinary time capsule, a temple of marble and sleek wood. When Leonardo and Turner began researching that heritage, they discovered the bank is on the brink of a downtown centennial.

Much of the lobby remains, that heritage, they discovered, from the bank’s early days. The chandelier — that must have chime Reduced to 40% from original to fit letter page

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