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Construction Industry Spotlight

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Keep your historic windows, save energy too

| *A Lynnwood-based company is making the Pioneer Building more efficient with interior storm windows.*

By **KATIE ZEMTSEFF**
Journal Staff Reporter

Windowvative Design is updating more than 400 windows in the historic Pioneer Building with a new energy-saving system. The project will be used as a case study to prove what's possible in improving the efficiency of historic windows.

The 1889 Pioneer Building, in Pioneer Square, is on the National Register for Historic Places. It has retail on the ground floor with offices above, and is the site where the Underground Tour starts. Windowvative is updating windows from the second through sixth floors. Seattle City Light is paying for about 20 percent of the project.



Photo courtesy of Shawn Jezerinac [enlarge]

Interior storm windows are being installed behind more than 400 windows in the historic Pioneer Building.

The system is designed to fit into the existing interior frame. Storm windows are often used on the exterior but not the interior. Interior storm windows add a second layer of glazing, creating an insulated air space between the panes.

Windowvative co-owner Van Calvez said the system can be used in any type of building, from residential to commercial, but historic buildings offer the most promise. Changes to historic structures are often restricted, and the buildings usually have old windows with leaky, single-pane glass.

With interior storm windows, an owner can increase efficiency while keeping the original frame and glass. Some models can be opened.

Calvez said other options to replace historic windows are expensive.

He said there are thousands of single-pane windows in Seattle. "Our primary competition is doing nothing. A lot of people don't realize there's an alternative and they've just assumed there's nothing they can do about their windows."

Calvez said it costs between \$250 and \$500 for Windowvative to build and install a standard 3-by-5-foot interior storm window. He said a vinyl replacement would cost about \$600, if historic agencies allow the change.

Other options are building a historically appropriate window, which he said could be \$1,000, or rebuilding the window from scratch, which might run \$1,500.

Calvez said interior storm windows usually have a payback of between five and 10 years. If a building is otherwise well insulated, he said adding storm windows could increase energy efficiency as much as 40 percent. But historic buildings often leak in many spaces, so it is more typical for the windows to reduce energy use by 20 percent, he said.

The Pioneer Building is owned by Richard and Dorothy Sikora. Richard Sikora is an environmentalist who has made other upgrades to the building.

Shawn Jezerinac, property manager of the Pioneer Building, said the building was in the middle of an energy-efficiency upgrade when Windowvative called them. Jezerinac said his team wasn't looking at window upgrades because they were too expensive, and could change the building's exterior. He said this option was better and cheaper.

"The (other) systems simply weren't competitive. And this is by far the best that we'd seen," he said. "We have glass in this building that's 120 years old. You don't want to replace that. It's charming, it's beautiful, it looks like a rippling brook in some places."

Jezerinac said the team is hoping the windows will improve energy efficiency, reduce outside noise and improve inside air quality. A lot of dirt comes through the single-pane windows today, he said. The HVAC system will bring in outside air and filter it. He is hoping the interior storm windows will prevent some dirt from entering the building.

Calvez said the building is a challenge because it has many different window shapes — curved glass, arches, cutout scallops and 10-foot-tall frames — that each storm window must match.

Windowvative is two years old. Calvez said the idea for the business came when he was sitting in his office next to a single-pane window. He was freezing, he said, and mad because of the wasted energy. He started talking with his brother-in-law, Jack Stinson, who has 25 years of experience in the window business. Together, they came up with the idea of using storm windows inside.

The company has about a dozen customers so far. It recently did a pilot project at the former Fire Station 18 in Ballard.

Starting a business during tough economic times has been a challenge. Calvez said they considered giving up several times but think the idea is sound and get encouragement from potential customers. "People like the idea (and) say they want it. That's what kept us going."

Lynnwood-based Windowvative works in the Puget Sound region between Bellingham and Tacoma.

Historic Seattle will hold a presentation on the technique on Feb. 25 from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Cost is \$5 for students, \$10 for members and \$15 for others. For more information, visit www.historicseattle.org.



Photo by Julie Stinson [enlarge]
Jack Stinson fits a storm window inside the old Fire Station 18 in Ballard.

Katie Zemtseff can be reached by email or by phone at (206) 622-8272.

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