

MEF's Recent Organizational Growth

Since MEF was founded in 1991, the organization has maintained its offices (in its second floor suites on Center Street), in Northampton despite several expansions over the past decade. Most recently, in response to an increased demand for its educational resources, MEF's staff has doubled in size, and the organization's production and editing facilities have also expanded over the past year. While this organizational growth has created stability and allowed MEF to increase its services and productivity, it also led MEF to consider acquiring a permanent facility that would better accommodate the staff, by providing adequate and better-designed workspace.

In July 2001, MEF placed the winning bid on the historic Masonic Street Firehouse property, in Northampton, MA. (Currently, MEF staff can see the Firehouse from our office windows).

MEF plans to purchase the Firehouse in the spring of 2002 and restore its physical structure and architectural distinctiveness, as well as its significance to the community; transforming what is now a blighted building into two floors of community, cultural and office spaces. Currently, MEF's twenty staff members, as well as its production, editing and distribution facilities are all located in three office suites (approximately 2,800 sq. ft.) The Firehouse measures 9,500 sq. ft. and will offer MEF the ability to configure and design this larger space to meet the specific needs of MEF and the community.

By relocating its facilities to the Firehouse, MEF can maintain its downtown location and still acquire a significant amount of office space to accommodate recent organizational growth and its expanded internship program. To build upon existing cultural resources and in an effort to support a local arts organization, MEF also plans to lease a store-front portion of the ground level to *SHOW*, a new non-profit art gallery, dedicated to exhibiting all formats of art, created by contemporary and emerging artists.

Firehouse History

Since 1872, the Masonic Street Firehouse has held a central place in Northampton's history. William Fenno Pratt—a local architect responsible for Northampton's unique architecture and known for his wide repertoire of designs, constructed the Masonic Street Firehouse to provide a permanent home for the local fire company. Although the building has undergone alterations and enlargement since 1872, it has retained its distinctive features: two towers (one of which was used to dry the fire hoses) several large garage bays built to house the fire engines, and a patterned cornice that frames the front façade.

MEF & Community

Working with Thomas Douglas, another renowned local architect, MEF plans to renovate the Firehouse to reference the building's history and meet the modern needs of MEF and the local community.

To fulfill both the local community's need for affordable and handicap-accessible community meeting spaces, and MEF's need for an in-house screening room, MEF will construct a multipurpose meeting room on the ground level that will be outfitted with cutting-edge technology for meeting, educational and multi-media screening purposes.

This meeting room will also enable MEF to expand its educational services to include on-site violence prevention and media literacy trainings for educators, law enforcement, and social workers from the local region, and across the country.

Ultimately, the renovation of this historic building will not only allow MEF to continue to grow and give back to its community, but it will also result in added vitality to the core of downtown Northampton.