

Oklahoma City

downtown

Monthly

Acceleration on the Alley

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Triply Terrific *Wine, Women and Shoes*

ACCELERATION ON THE ALLEY





"I started investing in real estate on Broadway back when it was boarded up with broken windows and grass growing through the sidewalk."

By **Kent Anderson** Photos by **K.O. Rinearson**

In 1920, Oklahoma City was still a young town making its way, looking for its character and its personality. North of downtown, automotive dealerships began to spring up like wildflowers on Broadway. Among them was the Packard Building at 811 N. Broadway, offering one of America's iconic luxury cars. It was a fine time and place to buy an outstanding automobile.

Nine decades later, Packard is no more. Its last cars rolled off the line in 1958. But the Packard Oklahoma Motor Company building still stands in the area now known as Automobile Alley. 811 N. Broadway, after years as home to the Individual Artists of Oklahoma Gallery, now houses Accel Financial Staffing, led by modern-day urban pioneer and Oklahoma City Council member Meg Salyer.

"I started investing in real estate on Broadway back when it was boarded up with broken windows and grass growing through the sidewalk," Salyer says. "To see this transformation, and to be able to plant ourselves right in the middle of it all, is a real success story for me."

Salyer planned to open Accel in the spring of 1995, a difficult time to consider a new enterprise in downtown Oklahoma City. And while the Murrah Building bombing may have delayed opening the doors, it didn't deter Meg Salyer from her determination to be a part of downtown. Accel opened in the Magnolia Building across Broadway, and there it stayed for nearly 15 years, until the move to the Packard Building in March of this year.



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Accel had grown onto two floors of the Magnolia Building, a less than efficient layout for the staff. Salyer wanted to be on a single floor, plus she craved the convenience and visibility of the business actually fronting Broadway.

“Plus,” she adds with a smile, “cars are in my husband Chris’ blood, and we liked the fact that this had once been the Packard dealership.”

With ideas aplenty, Salyer turned to Todd Edmonds and his team at HSE Architects to re-imagine the space. “I loved the space as a gallery and wanted to keep as much of that feel as possi-

ble,” Salyer says. “But, as it turns out, the only things left standing were the stalls in the bathrooms!”

At HSE, interior designer Shelby Smith, working closely with Salyer, brought the interior to life. It is a clean and contemporary look, a carefully planned contrast to the historic nature of the building itself.

Salyer confesses to being a “closet architect and designer” from her days in her hometown of New York City, in which she was acquainted with a number of young architects and designers, many of whom have become recognized leaders in their fields. Of the new look for 811 N. Broadway, she says, “It’s a combination of a very contemporary and minimalist look. I live in a beautiful home, built in 1907, but very traditional. So I’ve always wanted to have this kind of space.”

Large glass windows – a theme throughout the Accel offices – front Broadway and enclose the reception area. Still, the eye cannot help but be drawn to the south end of the room. Perhaps it’s the blue acrylic wall. Then again, it might be the bison that stands guard over the place.

“Jules,” as Salyer calls the sculpture, was one of the Oklahoma Centennial bison, 100 of which were (and many still are) on display throughout the state during the 2007 centennial celebrations. Meg and Chris Salyer commissioned two of the 100 bison, and this one is covered with gems, with one crowning point – green custom-blown horns by famed glass artist Dale Chihuly.

Also in the reception area is a photo collage by New York artist Phillip Stein, including a picture of the New



Todd Edmonds and Shelby Smith

York apartment building where Salyer once lived. The collage was a gift to Meg from her husband.

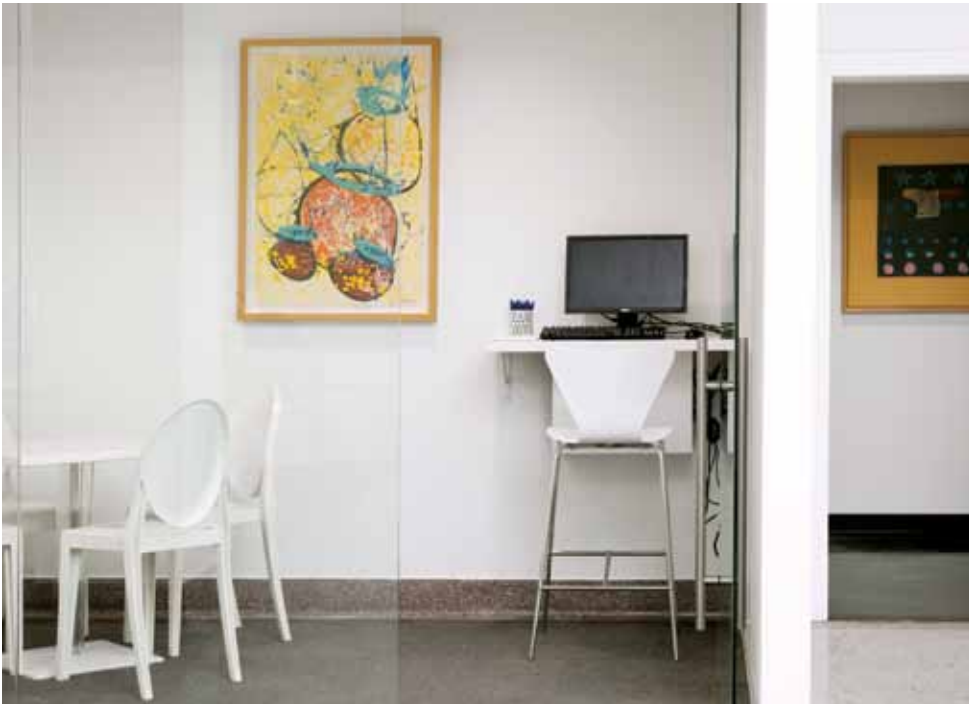
The Accel conference room is one of the most striking spaces in the building. Salyer credits architect Edmonds with this room’s intriguing aesthetic: an oval hole in the ceiling, from which hangs a contemporary light fixture. The ceiling oval matches exactly the shape of the conference table below it, adding great symmetry to the room. A

vibrant splash of color comes from the chairs surrounding the table.

“I was fixated on trying to find yellow mesh chairs,” Salyer laughs. Yellow is one of Accel’s corporate colors.

The conference room is enclosed in glass, but retractable curtains, activated at the touch of a button, add privacy when needed. Another thoughtful aspect of the conference room is a series of paintings from the 1830s by Scottish artist David Roberts. The

Spaces *The Packard Building*



paintings are of Egypt and the Holy Land, and have been in Salyer's personal collection for some time.

Behind the conference room is a sizable open space with modular furniture, where several of the Accel team members work. The furniture is designed for teamwork. Rolling file drawers double as stools on which staff members can sit and talk with each other about collaborative projects.



There is a small kitchen/break area with a nod to the building's history: a section of the original brick wall remains. Since Accel is in the human resources business, there are three interview rooms, all behind glass but affording privacy.

Salyer is also pleased to point out a charmingly quirky part of the design: the ladies' room, with a shower and a small section of river rock flooring, and the painting "The Lady's Room" by local artist Suzanne Randall.

Salyer's office is sleek and modern in black and white, with an updated sliding barn-style door separating it from the reception area. Even here, though, is a bit of the original brick wall, paying homage to the days of Packard.

Most of the Accel team members have been with Salyer for a long time, and they love the new offices for the energy, the originality, the functionality. Probably the indoor parking, too, as staffers are able to park in the old garage portion at the back of the building, not far from the car elevator that once moved luxury Packards.

As for Meg Salyer, businesswoman and city leader, she couldn't be happier with her new professional home, and she enjoys the excitement that permeates Auto-



Spaces *The Packard Building*



mobile Alley and downtown as a whole. “I felt like it was the right time for us to be here,” she says. “I believe in Oklahoma City, and we have so many good things ahead of us.”

There are no Packards moving in and out of 811 N. Broadway these days. But since 1920, this building has seen much of Oklahoma City’s history: early glory days, boom and bust, urban decay, the horror of terrorism, the “Oklahoma standard” of a community coming together, the gradual return to joyful vitality of the city’s core. Meg Salyer, with her infectious enthusiasm and love of the city, is out to show that the best years may be still to come. ■