

Revitalizing Homestead's old avenue

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For more than five decades, 35 N. Krome was a favorite place to shop for furniture in Homestead.

Then the winds of Hurricane Andrew came along and gave the landmark building a thorough whipping.

Homestead Furniture Company resettled a block or so north of their traditional location, but the company's old building was on death row — until local architect Robert Barnes rescued it from the wrecking ball.

Built by Frank Webb in the 1930s, Ron Webb, Frank's son and the current company operator, was planning to demolish the building after the storm left the structure unfit for people to safely stand in, let alone run a business from.

"I had no insurance on it," Webb said, "and I didn't have the money to fix it up again."

Since Webb couldn't afford to rebuild it, he offered Barnes the edifice's unique tin ceiling. Embossed with patterns, the ceiling looked like it was hand-crafted.

"Those types of ceilings were popular from the late 1800s up through the '40s," Barnes said.

But the architect was more interested in saving the whole building and offered to find someone who would buy it. Enter

New life for another antique building

and his partner's decision to buy the structure. "Unfortunately, we couldn't save the ceiling."

The tin ceiling, which initiated the crusade to save the building in the first place, turned out to be water damaged beyond repair. "It was shot," Barnes said, "rust-ed through in too many places."

But there was still plenty of history left in 35 N. Krome. "It's great to work with a building that has true historical structure," Barnes said. "You just can't replace the original fabric. I've seen it tried and it looks plastic."

With so few historical buildings left standing after Andrew, saving what was left took on renewed significance. Barnes and Mullins were determined that this building would not be just another casualty of Andrew.

"It's made with Dade County pine," said Mullins. "I've already seen too many of these old pine

buildings destroyed. If we can salvage one, it's worthwhile."

Webb is just glad to see his family's old building get a new chance. "I'm very proud that Rick is bringing it back," Webb said. "It makes me real happy."

Mullins has been working on the renovation project since last July and expects to see it finished by this summer. The outside of the building has been completely refinished, and a canopy added and entranceways opened up on the south side.

Four shops, available for lease, will occupy the interior when complete.

Webb has no regrets over losing possession of the venerable building. He knows it's in good hands. "I think it's going to be a real asset to the community," Webb said. "I'm looking forward to seeing people occupy it once again."



PHOTOS BY JOANNE KIMBERLIN

CONFERRING — Architect Robert Barnes (left) and contractor Richard Mullins discuss renovation plans for the old Homestead Furniture building on downtown Krome.



EASY DOES IT — A workman carefully guts 35 N. Krome in an effort to save the old embossed tin ceiling.

Richard Mullins, a local contractor who specializes in renovating old buildings.

Webb transferred ownership to Mullins and his partner Joe Gugin. "Webb got quite emotional," Barnes said about the signing over of the building.

"I grew up with this place," Webb said. "I was practically raised in this old building. Giving it up was a sentimental experience."

"We wanted to save it from the bulldozer," Mullins said about his