

Model Mill a 'wow' project for downtown Johnson City

TONY CASEY • MAR 11, 2017 AT 4:29 PM

tcasey@johnsoncitypress.com

Grant Summers never thought about pulling out of a planned deal to buy and rehab the historic Model Mill, even after tough negotiations with the Johnson City-Jonesborough-Washington County Chamber of Commerce and the fire that destroyed parts of the structure.

The mill was at the risk of becoming more of an eyesore than an iconic downtown Johnson City structure. Summers came to a sound deal with the previous owners and will progress toward a later-half 2018 finish date of his work at the site.

With his Summers-Taylor crews planning to move their corporate offices into the building, Summers said he's found some fun in demolishing the parts of the building that can't and won't be refurbished.

"There's a lot of fun old machinery in there that I'm saving, and brainstorming on how we can use it," Summers said. "There's a lot of fun little pieces. We've been uncovering the bricks and wooden columns."

"But overall, the (demolition) is going well. It's good or better than we thought it would be in a lot of spots (but) the flooring is worse than we thought it would be," he said.

The price agreed upon by Summers-Taylor Inc. and the area Chamber of Commerce was \$570,000.

The Model Mill caught fire in late September, but not enough damage was done to derail Summers' excitement about the project and investing in downtown Johnson City and the developing West Walnut Street corridor, where a new drive for commerce is focused.

Early in February, it was announced that an unnamed 17-year-old was charged with starting the fire.

Initially, it looked like the Model Mill — used to process flour for nearly 100 years — was to be taken down and apartments would be put up in its place, but that plan fell through.

Summers said his plans for a corporate headquarters location is a much better idea for the property, as it's both a part of the next frontier for downtown development and because of the way the community had rallied behind the structure.

"The Tree Streets have been phenomenal," he said. "And it's been amazing to see how many people are getting excited about it. I can't tell you how many people I didn't think would care about the Model Mill stop me to tell me how they can't wait."

The Chamber of Commerce is also excited.

At the time of the announcement of the sale, Chamber CEO Gary Maybrey said the plan is going as well as it could have.

"Our boards, since we've owned the building, have wanted to preserve the Model Mill," he said. "To think we have a local, long-standing company with a reputation for investing in the community, it's very positive."