

# Various projects, clients bringing more opportunities for Signworks

by Michelle Leach

Long-term clients who worked with succeeding generations of family leadership are converging with a rush of projects in a recovering economy as Signworks carves out new traditions.

"For years we would go see the client to make it easier by coming to them," said Gaby Ryan, who owns

and operates the business with sister Mikaela Layson. "One of the things we have focused on after the recession is to get the clients to our facility. Outside, we look like a regular building in a quiet industrial zone but then you walk through where we still manufacture neon and see where our employees are

Continued on page 35.

# Various projects, clients bringing more opportunities for Signworks

Continued from page 1.

making and assembling signs.

"Clients understand the investments they're making a bit more. They understand I'm not going to pull something off of a shelf or have it made in China. We're engineering, fabricating, and installing the sign here. They appreciate the process so much more."

From a manufacturing space the size of two gyms at 4713 F St., Signworks has grown up from a business started by Ryan's great-grandparents in 1935, and offers repair, maintenance, and project management in addition to some of the capabilities mentioned above.

Ryan's mother took over the business in the early 1990s, and would run it for 20-plus years.

The younger generation would get to know another "interesting time" in the country.

"Omaha was a little insulated from the economic downturn in the initial stages," she said. "We didn't see the effects of that until 2010 and 2011, and it meant people weren't buying signs."

Signs that were being bought were small-

er, featured fewer colors, and lower-quality materials, according to Ryan, who noted the floodgates open in the second or third quarter of 2013.

"It almost felt like a gold rush," she said.

The phones started ringing again with people buying signs — what leadership refers to as "a good economic measuring device."

"In Omaha there is an entrepreneurial spirit," she said. "People are pursuing their dreams and signage is paramount to make that dream a reality."

An example of the difference a few years makes can be found in its bank clients.

Ryan said a few branches were delayed during the recession only to be built when clients "felt like the economy was safe again."

Construction in the health care industry has also trickled down to the need for signs;

however, Ryan refers to strength in its diversity, with clients ranging from lawyers to dentists — some even worked with preceding matriarchs.

The Henry Doorly Zoo represents a long-term client.

"Because we're in the sign business, some people think that's all we can do," she said.

A nod to its diverse capabilities, Ryan said it was commissioned to create a large chandelier installed in the African Lodge.

Unlike any sparkly chandelier, the project echoes the surrounding lodge with large fins and panels, rustic appearance, and the use of buckskin.

Accompanying sconces or fixtures feature indigenous designs evocative of Africa.

Another unique project was for the Do Space off 72nd and Dodge streets. The

next-generation library features a digital billboard with evolving messages designed to engage the community.

Ryan also highlighted its revamping the Wayne State College basketball team's locker room with the likes of logos and banners to give new life to the retro space.

Its roughly 22 employees represent a stable workforce. Half of its employees have been with Signworks for at least 15 years and Ryan recalls a father who worked with a daughter and a nephew with an uncle.

"Historically, the sign business has been very familial," she said.

While long-time employees who straddle both artistry and technology may be impossible to replace, Ryan said it is open to training career-changers and other new employees.

"My sister and I are the stewards of this company," she said. "The employees put in a lot of hours and overtime to make projects happen on time."

"You have to have the clients to keep the employees busy and you've got to keep the employees busy to keep the workflow going. They are really family here and we're really fortunate."

## Signworks

Phone: 402-346-5447

Address: 4713 F St., Omaha 68117

Services: sign and logo design, manufacturing, installation, repair and maintenance, project management

Founded: 1935

Goals: Ongoing hiring. Potentially add more historical info to its website.

Industry outlook: Signage, related services depend on entrepreneurial activity, while entrepreneurs depend on signs for success as a means of branding, patrons finding business.

Website: [www.signworksomaha.com](http://www.signworksomaha.com)

