

Cape businesses using art, landscaping to spruce up property

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SCOTT MOYERS ~ Southeast Missourian

To John Abercrombie, the southeast corner of Kingshighway and Broadway had looked the same since he moved here in 1973 -- a little run-down, a tad dated and a bit boring.

"It looked about the same all that time," said Abercrombie, president of Capaha Bank. "We wanted to change that."

So when Capaha Bank bought the property a few years back for the site of a new \$1.2 million bank, Abercrombie was in a position to make changes.

But he didn't want to just put in a nice, new brick bank. The bank, which opened its new 4,300-square-foot branch last week, also spent an additional \$100,000 for a landscaping project that included artistic statues of three children and a dog walking across a log.

"We were excited about having a great location for a branch," he said. "But we also derived a great deal of satisfaction out of doing something more. We decided at some point to take this highly visible corner and transform it from a run-down corner into something nice."

The bank even went to a big-time landscaping firm, SWT Design of St. Louis, to do the work. Abercrombie said the scenic green space and eye-catching statues follow the philosophy of Cape Girardeau's leaders to beautify the city.

But Capaha Bank and Abercrombie aren't the only ones. Businesses across town are incorporating art, landscaping and other methods to make new businesses and buildings look contemporary or to spruce up existing locations.

A few years ago, CP McGinty's remodeled their jewelry store and commissioned local artist Craig Thomas to design a mural that depicts everyday people doing their jobs. Broussard's restaurant and First Missouri State Bank also have murals by Thomas.

In May, city and business leaders unveiled a newly landscaped entrance to the city along Interstate 55 at the southbound exit ramp near mile marker 96. The project was a partnership with the new Sears Grand, which contributed \$10,000 toward the work.

Scott Blank, owner of the Bi-State convenience stores, also recently put in a series of ornate landscaped waterfalls at his store at 930 N. Kingshighway.

"We wanted to put something in that would be kind of different and kind of neat," he said.

The decision is partly a business one and partly out of civic responsibility, he said.



A statue of a girl playing on a log stands in front of the new Capaha Bank off Broadway in Cape Girardeau. (Diane L. Wilson)

"Businesswise, does it give us a better return on our investment? Probably not," Blank said. "But does it improve our location and our look and make us more appealing? Sure it does."

Cape Girardeau Mayor Jay Knudtson said projects like these fall in line with the city's recent anti-litter campaign and ordinances to reduce "unsightly banners" from public rights of way.

"I think it's just a real tangible example of exactly what we are trying to achieve in our great city," Knudtson said. "When you see projects like this one and others, in some respects it's mission accomplished."

Knudtson hopes that the projects done by Bi-State and Capaha will encourage other businesses to follow suit. And he believes it will help their businesses in the long run.

"People will want to do business with people that make an investment in the community like that," Knudtson said.