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Co-working fosters collaboration, and area firms are on board

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Jennifer and Gary Lader are opening CoWork 414, a vintage building under renovation at 414 W. Broad St. in Bethlehem

Co-working is not new, but the trend of sharing working space with other companies appears to be gaining momentum in the Greater Lehigh Valley.

The idea of sharing, whether it be rooms, desks, tables or kitchen space, can lead to more collaboration and create an atmosphere that encourages a level of interaction not found in the more traditional office environment.

Co-working appears to be catching on in both city and office environments across the Greater Lehigh Valley the past few years.

When Peoples Security Bank & Trust started leasing its building in Bethlehem Township, the bank decided it wanted shared office spaces on the second floor.

In 2010, Bridgeworks Enterprise Center in Allentown opened its co-working space and remodeled and expanded it in 2015 through some funds awarded by the Small Business Administration, and in South Bethlehem, SoBeCoWorks offers another type of collaborative workspace.

One firm that's doing it is Bonsall Shafferman Architects and Space Planners, which will move out of its office park environment in Hanover Township, Northampton County, into a co-working space that offers flexible environments where different firms can network and collaborate while working in the same building.

Jennifer and Gary Lader are opening CoWork 414, a vintage building under renovation at 414 W. Broad St. in Bethlehem, which will be home to Bonsall Shafferman and other small businesses and entrepreneurs both young and old, seeking a different way to work.

Co-working can foster that sense of wanting to help others and support their success, which is where networking opportunities come into play. The ability to connect to the local community and reach out to small businesses can also be easier when people of different backgrounds, experiences and professions gather on a regular basis.

In a world where technology makes our lives easier and claims to bring us closer together, it can also create that false sense of social interaction. We often talk, text and type to communicate without being in the same room with the person.

For those who work remotely, the feeling of isolation can be stifling.

The co-working environment clearly may not work for everyone, particularly for those who prefer working alone and in silence or near silence in their standard cubicle.

But there's something intriguing about working in a mini-community that encourages sharing and support over isolation and competition. Plus, sharing office space with companies in similar or complementary businesses has its own perks with the potential for generating fresh ideas that may not have been born otherwise.

As social creatures, even the most introverted among us crave at least some social interaction during the workday. The co-working environment fosters that interaction by its very design.

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