

DEVELOPMENT DETAILS

A+ STORAGE

Nashville, Tennessee

By Jennifer LeClaire

What does rock n' roll have to do with self-storage? When it's a facility in the heart of Nashville's Music Row, it doesn't hurt that the owners are two ex-musicians who have a track record for launching successful self-storage operations.

In fact, one of the owners was touring with Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons when the old warehouse that is now A+ Storage was originally constructed. The other was preparing for his future role as the singing voice of Winnie the Pooh. Of course, that was decades ago. Today, the duo is making melodies in Nashville's self-storage market with a warehouse conversion that has won the attention of the historic community when named as *Mini-Storage Messenger's* 2008 Facility of the Year runner-up in the conversion category.

Tim Stone and Tommy Pierce met each other in "Music City" when they were active members of the entertainment industry. Decades later, they decided to make a new sound in self-storage. They formed A+ Storage of Tennessee and have completed nine self-storage facilities. The Nashville facility is the duo's first conversion project.

Once a generic, aging downtown Nashville warehouse, the facility now boasts more than 600 multi-sized climate-controlled storage units and 34 rentable parking spaces. The former warehouse also includes Class-A office space for A+ Storage's corporate headquarters and offers additional space for lease to the residents of the famed Music Row. Music Row developed in the 1950s as a center of the recording industry. Elvis's first RCA recordings were completed there. A+ Storage is in a high-end area that is experiencing a renaissance.

"We were looking for a conversion opportunity for quite some time when we found this warehouse in this special area," Stone says. "This property sits right next to a premier condominium development that Magic Johnson has invested in called the Terrazzo and its right across the street from another building, the Icon, which is also getting a lot of attention. This was a miraculous opportunity."

Singing A New Tune

When Pierce and Stone set out to convert the old, run-down warehouse into a new, state-of-the-art self-storage facility, they turned to an architect they trusted to design the 76,000-square-foot, climate-controlled facility with 600 units: Robin Hood, a principal of Crossroads Architecture in Nashville.

Hood's mission was to pick up on the architectural feel of old Downtown Nashville while also giving the design a fresh look for a new era in revitalized Downtown Nashville. The colors—muted yellows, crèmes, and brick accents—also blend in well with the surrounding environment. The building looks almost like a banner in its position on the corner, Hood says.

"The developers wanted to leave prospective tenants with the idea that A+ is a safe and clean place," Hood says. "Beyond the clean design, the



Photos courtesy of A+ Storage

developers also offer 24/7 video surveillance of the entire perimeter of the facility. All of the entrances and elevators have keypad entry systems. Tim and Tommy wanted an aesthetically-pleasing building that makes people feel comfortable. We achieved that. We felt like this was a great opportunity to transform a metal warehouse to a huge volumetric space.”

The Demolition Blues

They achieved it all right, but not without some conversion challenges. The conversion project began with significant demolition work, as well as cutting out the elevator shaft. Steve Cravens, Principal of Cravens Construction in Antioch, Tenn., headed up the project. He says cutting the elevator pit for the two-story facility was a massive undertaking.

“There were lots of little challenges with this conversion. The most challenging part of the job was installing the sprinkler system and digging the elevator pit,” Cravens says. “But fitting all the units into the building with the proper widths was also difficult. Maintaining the heights of the walls and the width of the hallways with this retrofit took a lot of planning.”

For the storage system design, the developers worked with U.S. Door & Building Components. To pull off the second floor strategy, U.S. Door’s Access-A-Deck mezzanine system was installed. The system was chosen because it doubles the net rentable space and resulting income. Because Access-A-Deck flooring weighs considerably less than concrete, it allowed U.S. Door’s structural components to be placed directly over the existing concrete slabs without additional footers.

“We handled the entire mezzanine system. We actually took their old warehouse and converted it into a two-story self-storage facility with light gauge framing and technologically advanced flooring,” says Chip Cordes, vice president of U.S. Door. “This was a complete transformation inside and out.”

The hallways are tapped with motion sensors so lights come on when tenants visit the property. And the maze of hallways is named by streets, such as Hollywood Blvd., Boardwalk, Park Place, First Street, Main Street, and Wall Street. The facility’s

two elevators have doors that open on both sides, and there are three loading areas suitable for semi-trucks, pickup trucks, and even standard ground-level unloading.

“Doing a conversion is a real puzzle,” Stone says. “it was a challenge making improvements into an already existing shell.”

Conversion Challenges

The next set of challenges made digging an elevator pit look easy. The crew encountered beams that weren’t going anywhere, the insulation in the walls needed to be replaced, the wiring was old, and the ceiling had problems. In essence, the building had to be completely gutted.

“This was a different animal than just building storage from the ground up,” Stone says. “Getting the sprinkler system installed was a challenge, especially with our heights upstairs. But we made the most out of every square inch of this facility.”

Cordes confirmed Craven’s perspective: Designing a unit mix that fit the shape of the building and adhering to the height restrictions of the building’s exterior corners was a hurdle demanding keen problem-solving skills. Cordes says they had to design a unit mix that allowed the deeper units to run around the exterior walls so they could gain height for the hallways. They also had to make the unit mix layout with the existing column spacing, and there was an issue with the structure of the support walls. Finally, they had to design around two elevator lobbies and existing high-voltage virtual panels that were in the building.

A+ opened its doors May 2008 after only seven months of construction. Stone says, “Our whole concept is to be hospitable and courteous and kind to people. We train our managers to do anything they can to help customers. We are in the hospitality business, really.”

Jennifer LeClaire is a freelance writer based in Hallandale Beach, Florida, and a regular contributor to the *Mini-Storage Messenger* and *Self-Storage Now!* Her clients include The Associated Press, *The New York Times*, and CBS Television/Winstar Communications.



QUICK FACTS

Owner: Tim Stone and Tommy Pierce

Architect:
Crossroads Architecture,
Rodney L. Sartain

Builder: Cravens Construction

Doors and Interior Systems:
U.S. Doors & Building Components

Accounting System: Quik Stor

Security System:
Digitech International

Facility Size:
67,000 Rentable Square Feet

Total Units: 555 Units



Photos courtesy of A+ Storage