

MiBiz®



An affiliate of Waséyabek Development Co. LLC, the non-gaming arm of the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi, has purchased the Kendall Building, center, for its headquarters in downtown Grand Rapids. *PHOTO: KATY [BATDORFF](#)*

Tribal firm acquires historic Kendall Building in downtown GR

BY **JOE BOOMGAARD** Sunday, November 25, 2018, 09:50 pm

GRAND RAPIDS — The non-gaming arm of the **Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi** has acquired a downtown building for its headquarters as it looks to grow its federal contracting business, *MiBiz* has learned.

Through an affiliate, the tribe's **Waséyabek Development Co. LLC** closed on the purchase of the historic Kendall Building from a subsidiary of **616 Lofts LLC**. Waséyabek had been leasing the space from 616 Lofts since August 2017.

“We were here; we loved the building, loved the location and the conversation just proceeded from there into would they be interested in selling it and coming to an agreement with us purchasing it,” Waséyabek President and CEO Deidra Mitchell

told *MiBiz*. “We wanted to be in the business district right downtown, which is where most of our business partners are at.”

Waséyabek has a three-pronged buy-and-hold investment strategy focused on commercial real estate, federal contracting and commercial operating companies.

According to Mitchell, Waséyabek focused its initial property acquisition strategy on single-tenant facilities with long-term leases, which offered the company a chance to get some experience with doing deals. As well, the leased facilities offered “predictable cash flow” to fund Waséyabek’s other business dealings.

The Kendall Building property includes 12 market-rate apartments on the upper floors, one of which Waséyabek will keep for its own use, Mitchell said, noting members of the company’s federal contracting team live elsewhere in the country, but regularly visit the office for work.

The ground-floor commercial space currently is occupied by casual Italian restaurant **Osteria Rossa LLC**.

616 Principal Derek Coppess did not respond to a request for comment for this report. Grand Rapids-based **NAI Wisinski of West Michigan** represented the tribal entity in the transaction, which closed on Oct. 19 for an undisclosed sum.

Waséyabek followed the Grand Rapids property deal on Oct. 22 with the purchase of a 37,440-square-foot refrigerated warehouse near the Detroit Metropolitan Airport in Wayne County.

The pair of deals brings Waséyabek’s property holdings to four facilities. The company in June 2017 bought a 187,500-square-foot distribution warehouse on East Paris Avenue for \$10.4 million, and in November 2016 purchased a 17,100-square-foot **Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids Inc.** retail store for \$2.4 million, according to local property records.

Beyond property deals, Waséyabek looks to acquire established, revenue-producing commercial businesses based in the Great Lakes region that have strong company leadership and earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization (EBITDA) of \$1 million to \$6 million. The organization is targeting firms in the industrial, services, consumer, health care and technology sectors.

To date, Waséyabek has acquired a 100-percent stake in **Baker Engineering LLC**, a Nunica-based precision machining manufacturer with specialties in racing engines and research and development work for Department of Defense projects.

The firm also acquired a 60-percent stake in Grand Rapids-based **DWH LLC**, a succession planning, turnaround management and financial consulting services provider that also contracts with the federal government.

Waséyabek's investment strategy in commercial businesses takes "a pretty conservative approach," Mitchell said, noting the firm avoids turnarounds and startups, companies harmful to the environment, and other high-risk ventures such as firms in the cannabis industry. To date, Waséyabek also has steered clear of minority investments in target companies.

To take advantage of minority contracting advantages as a Native American-owned company, the tribal economic development firm last year launched **Waséyabek Federal Services LLC**, which specializes in facilities support, services and planning. The federal contractor just earned U.S. Small Business Administration 8(a) certification, which gives it access to set-aside government contracts specifically targeted to minority-owned businesses.

Waséyabek Federal Services' current business includes a contract to provide facilities support and general administrative services at the White House.

According to Mitchell, Waséyabek's need to access skilled workers also played a role in its recent move to Grand Rapids from the Pine Creek Indian Reservation near Athens, Mich., south of Battle Creek. As the company looks to scale up its federal contracting program, it needed both a building and a talent pool to support its growth, she said.

"Another reason we wanted to move to Grand Rapids was to attract employees," Mitchell said. "We've been able to find some with a federal contracting background, which has been nice."



Joe Boomgaard

Editor, covers craft beverage industry.

Twitter: [@jboomgaard](https://twitter.com/jboomgaard)

Email: jboomgaard@mibiz.com