



SMALL BUSINESS

Co-working's transition to mainstream poised to continue. **PAGE 10**



Business and a love of automobiles crash at The Garage

BY DAN SHINGLER

If you need a small office space with a big emphasis on indoor parking, Rick Briggs might have you, and your car or truck, covered.

Assuming you have a vehicle nice enough to warrant a spot, that is.

The semi-retired serial entrepreneur has opened a facility on the south side of Akron called The Garage, and it's both an office/co-working space and a place for car collectors to gather and store their beloved vehicles.

"I just wanted an office to work out of," Briggs said. "I had a couple of collector cars ... and I thought, there's got to be other people like me, maybe a little later in life and retired or semi-retired. They need a place to work out of, so why not have fun?"

Briggs bought an 11,000-square-foot building at 2623 S. Arlington Road that was formerly used by Walsh University but had fallen into disrepair. He opened it June 1 in sparkling condition, with a whole new interior featuring a high-end automotive-themed decor, a new roof and all-new mechanical systems.

To say there's an emphasis on fun might be an understatement. Aside from the expensive toys — the cars and trucks — Briggs has filled the place up with enough memorabilia to make denizens of "American Pick-



Cars and memorabilia make up a large part of The Garage's interior decor. | DAN SHINGLER/CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS PHOTOS

ers' sulk away in embarrassment.

There's the antique Coca-Cola machine, for example — still working, full and selling glass bottles of Coke for a dime. There's a mannequin in a

full racing suit, greeting guests as they come in, and a 1939 bumper car restored to pristine condition.

And that's just the car stuff. Briggs has also put plenty in to reflect his

well-known whimsical streak, with a nod to the old TV show "Get Smart." There's a phone booth with a shoe for a receiver and a working "come of silence" that Briggs had made, which

Garage space goes for \$295 a month for tenants that have an office, he said, though Briggs said he might be open to taking in a car from a non-tenant, if it was a cool enough vehicle.

So far, Briggs has attracted three full-time tenants — including a CPA, a for-hire CEO/consultant and a software programmer, along with a few people who use The Garage for co-working space, he said. Unfortunately, he lost a very high-profile tenant and friend when well-known Akron businessman Phil Maynard passed away early this year. A cardboard cutout of Maynard — his head attached to the body of a race-car driver for an event while he was still alive — now occupies the office Maynard was going to use.

"Phil was a real close friend," said Briggs. "He had furniture ordered and he was ready to move in ... that was a sad day."

The tenants who have set up shop in The Garage so far say they're very happy with the place and its vibe.

Accountant Chris George, who is semi-retired but still works for a few clients, has been in the building since it opened — along with his shiny red 1955 Ford pickup.

"This works out really well for me," George said. "It's near my house — I live just outside of North Canton. Access has been really easy. And for the people I'm still working with, it's nice to have good office space ... and everyone just enjoys looking at everything that's

lowers from the ceiling over the users' heads just like in real life. Sorry, just like on the old television show.

The Garage also has a state-of-the-art security system, which Briggs said was an essential item if he and his clients were going to store valuable collectible cars inside.

Currently, the building has six cars inside, including Briggs' treasured '67 Mustang convertible. They fill up all of the building's five garage spaces — each climate-controlled, accessible through the building's interior as well as outside, and 24 feet deep. But Briggs said at least two of the garage spaces will be freed up for new tenants and now have cars principally for staging.

The building already has had some success attracting corporate events. The Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce, the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Green Area Chamber of Commerce all have used the building's bar and reception area for events, as have a few companies, Briggs said.

The building has 13 office spaces inside for lease, ranging in size from 100 square feet to over 1,000 square feet, including one suite of three offices with a common reception area.

Briggs rents the individual offices for between \$595 and \$1,695 per month, he said, and is asking \$1,995 a month for the three-office suite.

in here."

Portage Lakes resident Phil Daetwyler, a contract CEO who works on corporate turnarounds, startups and helps prepare businesses for sale, is another tenant.

"It gives me a place to work, internet and printers, and you get to be in the company of some people who were extremely successful in their careers," Daetwyler said. "Or you can go to the bar and hang out and talk about the cars."

So far, Daetwyler isn't using a garage space, but the car culture of the place seems to be affecting his mind.

"I don't have a car suitable to go there," he said. "But I want one. ... I'd like an Aston Martin, that's what I'd like to have in there. You know, a James Bond-type car."

Briggs said rentals are going well, but that he didn't open the place to make money so much as to have an office for himself and a fun place to get together with other like-minded businesspeople and their cars.

"The whole idea is that someone might have a slew of collector cars, and it's an asset of the building that other people can enjoy looking at" them, Briggs said. "Even for people who aren't car people, it's universal. They come in and they love the big old truck or they say, 'I was in the backseat of a Mustang like that.'"

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The Garage, a hybrid shared-office space and car collector's club, opened on Arlington Road in Akron June 1.



Entrepreneur-turned-developer Rick Briggs in one of his favorite toys at The Garage in Akron.