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GREG BASTIN

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wanted to be on the cutting edge,
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GREG BASTIN

Fort Wayne dentist Hal Atkinson built the 12,000-square-foot Empire Center to house his practice and other retail and office tenants.

A bit of the Big Apple in the Summit City

BY TERRI HUGHES-LAZZELL
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While driving north to Hometown on Lima Road, you might do a double-take and, for a moment, think you're in the Big Apple instead of the Summit City.

No, it's not a scene from New York, it's a retail center and the home of Lima Road Dentistry, 9019 Lima Road. The building, called the Empire Center, was created by dentist Hal Atkinson.

Atkinson said he wanted a building that would draw attention, and he got the idea of a New York street scene because his wife is from the Big Apple.

Originally, he wanted a 50-foot replica of the Empire State Building, but local building codes wouldn't allow buildings taller than 35 feet. Instead, he settled for a sign replica of the Empire State Building and a New York City streetscape.

The building definitely is getting noticed.

"I was looking for anything that would stand out, grab attention," Atkinson said. "This is a high-visibility location, with 37,000 cars a day going by here, so we wanted to stand out and be seen, lessening the need for advertising."

His customers tell him how much they like the building's look. New customers tell him they never knew there was a

dentist in the area.

Atkinson's practice previously was located in a house 100 yards away from the Empire Center on Lima Road that he bought in 1993 and remodeled.

"It has made so much difference in business. It has been so much busier," he said.

His dental office, which at 6,000 square feet occupies half the building, opened in November 2006. The rest of the building became available in the summer of 2007.

Atkinson and Angie King specialize in serving individuals with a fear of going to the dentist. Atkinson practices general dentistry orthodontics, while King handles general dentistry and works with denture patients.

The remaining 6,000 square feet in the Empire Center building can be divided into areas as small as 1,200 square feet for retail and office use. BND Commercial Real Estate Solutions is the listing company for the building, with partner David Nugent and associate broker Autumn Bok handling the listing.

She said the building's exterior isn't its only selling point. It also features a state-of-the-art interior.

"We've had a couple of interested parties and some letters of intent, but nothing has closed yet," Bok said.