

Flat Iron conversion under way downtown

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Grand Rapids Business Journal

Locus Development has begun construction on the more than century-old Flat Iron building, which will be historically restored and converted into three floors of modern downtown office space at 102 Monroe Center.

The building is actually a composite of three adjacent four-story structures: the Flat Iron, Herkner and Groskopsf buildings. All are more than 130 years old. The renovation will combine the three structures' spaces on floors two through four into one contiguous space on each level. About 32,000 square feet of new office space will be the result in a building that will likely be LEED certified.

"Right now, we're busy completing a number of things in the building. We're making core and shell improvements, and new historical windows are being installed. We're demolishing the interior, and cleaning up the brick and some of the tuckpointing of the brick, as well, on the interior," John Green, a partner with Andy Winkel in Locus Development, said last month.

"Very soon we will be focusing on installing all new mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems in the building. A new roof is going on, as well as repair of the cornice work," he added.

The cornice work is important because Green said part of it has deteriorated along the Ottawa Avenue side of the building. Locus Development took protective measures a few years ago to keep it from crumbling and falling to the street. Green said he and Winkel thought it could become a safety hazard.

"We've had that protected now for a couple of years, so we're excited to finally be able to repair it and replace certain sections of the cornice work," he said.

Orion Construction is managing the project, which was designed by Cornerstone Architects. Green said the core and shell work should be done by July. Then the building's major tenant, Smith Haughey Rice & Roegge PC, will begin renovating its space, which should be completed by October. The law firm hired Design Plus and Wolverine Construction as its architect and project manager, respectively.

"The law firm will occupy a portion of the first floor, which will have a new entrance off Monroe Center, and from that lobby there will be access to the second, third and fourth floors, which will be completely occupied by Smith Haughey Rice and Roegge. They also will be constructing a rooftop deck," said Green.

The entire building is leased except for 1,250 square feet of first-floor space that the now-closed Blake's Turkey Shoppe occupied at the northwest corner of Monroe Center and Ottawa Avenue. "We will be bringing that space to a finished, white condition," said Green.

Renovating the structures according to historical preservation guidelines can add anywhere from 10 to 20 percent to a project's cost. Locus Development is investing about \$4.5 million into the work, which also is supported by federal and state historic tax credits.

But Green pointed out that a major reason the work is being done, in addition to the law firm becoming the tenant, is the faith that Grand River Bank showed in the project. "In a very financially challenging time, Grand River stepped up to the plate and recognized the importance of this landmark project," he said.

"It's encouraging to see a bank step up that understands the market and can move quickly in order to make a project happen. And that's a very encouraging sign," added Winkel.

Locus Development has another downtown office address — Thirty-Eight — at the intersection of Commerce Avenue and Weston Street SW. Green said construction is under way on the top two floors of the building. Deloitte Inc., an accounting, auditing, tax-planning and financial consulting firm, plans to move about 90 employees to the fifth and sixth levels of the LEED-certified structure this month. He also said they were negotiating with another company that is looking to lease a floor, and a few other smaller potential tenants. If all are landed, the Thirty-Eight office space will be filled.

"We're continuing to work through the first-floor restaurant and rooftop spaces with another tenant," said Green. "We are very busy and we're real pleased."



PEOPLE WITH A stake in the new Flat Iron are, from left, Dave Blosser and Ryan Wolhuis, Grand River Bank; Lisa Young, Smith Haughey Rice & Roegge; and Locus Development partners John Green and Andy Winkel. Photo by Alissa Lane