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BUSINESS

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Warehouse has creative future Studios for artists, developer's own condo

By: Murray McNeill

Posted: 06/20/2011 1:00 AM | Comments: 0 (including replies)

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John Hunsberger in an artist's studio in the old warehouse (below) at 618 Arlington St.

A local real estate agent/developer is hoping Winnipeg artists will help him breathe new life into a once-vacant, century-old West End warehouse.

John Hunsberger of Empire Real Estate Service is in the midst of converting the former National Upholstery Building at 618 Arlington St. into artist's studios.

Hunsberger paid \$165,000 for the vacant, four-storey, 25,000-square-foot building. He plans to convert the first three floors into artist's studios, and the top floor into a 5,100-square-foot penthouse condominium for himself.

The first floor has already been transformed into nine funky little artist's studios, ranging in size from 240 to 400 square feet.

The studios all open up onto a 1,000-square-foot hallway/common area that can be used for staging art shows. Instead of putting up drywall between the studios and the common area, Hunsberger had walls

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fashioned out of a variety of reclaimed materials, including old wooden doors, lumber, tin sheeting, a stained-glass window and wrought-iron wheels, gates, fences and staircase railings.

"It's kind of a mishmash of different things, but once you sandblast it and paint it all the same colour (black), it kind of works," he said.

Why artist's studios?

"I just heard and read about how artists are getting bumped out of the Exchange District and North Point Douglas because of all of the condo developments," Hunsberger said. "I figured there would be a glut of artists out there with no place to go. So when this building became available... I saw an opportunity to convert it into artist's studios."

He said four of the nine main-floor studios have been rented so far, and that's with little marketing. He's hoping the other five will also fill up fairly quickly. Rents range from \$400 to \$625 a month.

Hunsberger said he's spent about \$300,000 on renovations to the interior and exterior of the building and that it will likely cost him another \$200,000 before he's finished.

Renovations have already begun on the second and third floors, which will be converted into larger studios. He hopes to have them finished by next spring, and then he'll tackle the top floor.

Hunsberger said he's not sure how long it will take to finish the condo. "But I'm really looking forward to that. I think it's going to be a lot of fun."

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They'll have to wait awhile, but more help is on the way for beleaguered Winnipeg apartment hunters.

Work is expected to get underway within the next two months on two new apartment complexes in the city -- one in North Kildonan and the other in east St. Boniface.

The North Kildonan project is Vancouver-based Devonshire Properties Inc.'s once-controversial 400-suite expansion of its Edgewood Estates development on Whellams Lane.

Devonshire owner/president Zev Shafran said work on the first of two 22-storey apartment blocks is expected to begin within the next two months and take about 20 months to complete.

The other project is a three-building, 197-unit development by one of the most active apartment developers in the city in recent years -- B.C.-based Broadstreet Properties Inc.

Broadstreet president and CEO Kris Mailman said the company hopes to begin construction within the next month on a parcel of land on the southwest corner of Dugald Road and Guy Savoie Drive. All three buildings will feature two-bedroom apartments and should be complete by next spring.

Mailman said Broadstreet is also building 124 townhouse-style rental units at the south end of the same subdivision. Work is already underway on those three-bedroom units and should be done by the end of the year.

Devonshire's \$40-million to \$50-million project has gone through a number of revisions because of opposition from area residents to the original plan for one 35-storey building.

The residents feared it would create traffic problems and obstruct views of the nearby Red River. So Devonshire agreed to erect two smaller buildings and place them farther back from the river. Although it initially said they would be 15 and 21 storeys high, the number of suites remains roughly the same -- about 400.

Shafran said the company wants to see how fast the first building leases up before deciding when to proceed with the second phase. With a record-low overall apartment vacancy rate of 0.7 per cent in Winnipeg, it shouldn't take long.

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A local boutique developer has decided to go all out with its redevelopment of a century-old building on south Main Street.

Space2Work.com hopes to have the former Ikon Office Solutions building at 272 Main St. designated a heritage building and to obtain Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green-building certification for it once the top-to-bottom renovations and upgrades are complete.

As reported last October, Space2Work is spending several million dollars to redevelop the five-storey building, located just south of Graham Avenue.

The metal false facade has already been removed, new windows have been installed, and the front entranceway is being restored to its original state. Company CEO Mark Buleziuk said the hoarding around the front entrance will be removed within the next month.

But some of the interior renovations will be delayed until it's determined whether it's feasible to go after a heritage designation and LEED certification. Buleziuk said "we hope to know soon" how long that will take.



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3. Fire commissioner sacked
4. ABC apologizes for Nicki Minaj wardrobe malfunction that briefly exposed her nipple
5. Seriously injured assault victim found on sidewalk
6. A superfood arrives
7. Man charged with arson to fight charges: lawyer
8. Mr Bean actor Rowan Atkinson leaves UK hospital after sustaining injuries in sports car crash
9. Avery arrested at Hollywood Hills home over allegations he shoved a police officer
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" I think the larger issue here is ... why charges were laid in the first place?? "

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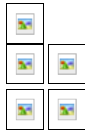
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