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Building energy

Award winners reflect green aspect of Winnipeg's hot market

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The Richardson Centre Concourse won the award for a renovated building.

The mini-renaissance taking place in the Winnipeg real estate market is happening within the context of only a modest uptick in population and economic growth.

What that means, among other things, is while there may not be enough demand for a brand-new multi-tenant downtown office tower, the existing stock of buildings must be refreshed to maintain their market standing.

With widespread development of building technology innovations, there is no excuse for building owners and managers not to adapt the most energy-efficient and environmentally effective strategies.



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Multicoloured windows have dramatically spruced up 363 Broadway, built in 1977.

If they don't do it, their competitors will.

Every year the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) of Manitoba recognizes a number of member buildings at its annual Awards of Excellence event.

The winners, announced at a luncheon at the Delta Winnipeg on June 13, demonstrate a commitment to excellence with a dash of flare indicative of some new-found energy evident throughout the downtown.

-- Outstanding Building of the Year -- office, 100,000 to 250,000 square feet: 363 Broadway (Morguard Investments Ltd.)

A new visitor to Winnipeg would be excused for thinking the 15-storey, 191,000-square-foot building with its mosaic of blue, green and grey windows at the northwest corner of Broadway and Carlton Street was a brand-new building.

But 363 Broadway, owned by Pensionfund Realty Ltd. and managed by Morguard Investments Ltd., was built in 1977.

As fanciful as the new, multi-coloured glass building envelope is, its function is far more than decorative.

"First of all, it had to be done," said Karen Lund, general manager of the Winnipeg regional office of Morguard Investments. "There's lots of material now that says every 40 years, glass building envelopes lose their energy efficiency."

The specially glazed windows -- 80,000 square feet of them -- allow up to 60 per cent more natural light into the building and keep space, particularly on the south and west sides, cooler at those times of the day when it should be.

But when planning the \$4-million project, there was a clear determination to also make a design statement.

"If you are going to spend that kind of money and change all the windows, you might as well do something different..." Lund said.

Tenant disruptions for such a significant project were surprisingly benign. Because of the weight of the windows -- 70 to 90 kilograms each -- most needed to be brought into the building.

Unavoidable daytime drilling caused few complaints from tenants.

The year-long project, completed at the end of 2011, may or may not be enough to lure a new anchor tenant to the building, but it certainly won't hurt. Lund said her building lost its former anchor tenant, the call centre Inspyre, at the beginning of last year and she's looking to fill three floors, ideally with one tenant who would also be able to have naming rights.

-- Outstanding Building of the Year -- renovated building: Richardson Centre Concourse (Bentall Kennedy)

The shopping concourse beneath the 424,135-square-foot Richardson Building was once a modern

urban marvel -- Western Canada's first underground retail experience.

Built in 1970, it's now part of the larger underground commercial space linking the four corners of Portage and Main and not nearly the novel experience it might once have been.

But it still resides at one of the most famous corners in the country and its owner -- James Richardson & Sons -- is one of the most prestigious family enterprises in the land.

So you could say the former state of affairs of the concourse did not do justice to its address or its proprietor.

None of the thousands of people who use the space daily would disagree it needed work.

"It was long overdue," said Dave Finnbogason, vice-president of corporate development for James Richardson & Sons. "We spent some time deciding what to do. We wanted to make sure it was fresh and did not have a look that would set you back a decade or two."

Part of a larger \$10-million project that included substantial work on the Richardson-owned former Bank of Canada Building at 161 Portage Ave., as well as the Lombard Avenue parkade, the Richardson Centre Concourse got a top-to-bottom redo.

The old floor was ripped out and replaced with granite tiles, and new wall and ceiling coverings were installed as well as new mechanical systems and a brand-new, state-of-the-art conference centre that can accommodate up to 170 guests for meetings and business functions.

No longer exclusively retail, Finnbogason said the mixed-use approach works with the general intention of providing services to their buildings' tenants.

As excellent as the newly completed concourse renovations are, Finnbogason said the plan is to remain patient when it comes to the 35 per cent of the space that remains vacant.

-- Outstanding Building of the Year -- corporate facility: Cityplace (Trioest)

This category recognizes office buildings that are at least 50 per cent occupied by a corporate entity.

In this case, Cityplace at 234 Donald St. is owned by Manitoba Public Insurance.

The provincial Crown corporation has used the 339,000-square-foot building as its headquarters for 25 years and purchased it in 2007.

"The building is 90 years old and we are approaching it to be here for another 90 years," said Brian Smiley, spokesman for MPI.

The provincial auto insurer occupies about 80 per cent of the office space, a total that has grown, especially since it acquired the building.

Although the two floors of retail have had a spotty history over the years, it still boasts an attractive group of tenants that includes Boston Pizza, Rexall Drugs and the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission.

Strong rumours prevail that a prominent sports bar is in the works on the second floor with its direct skywalk link to the MTS Centre across the street.

Smiley said the decision to purchase the building will mean millions of dollars in savings for the

corporation over the years.

"Every business decision we make is on behalf of our ratepayers and designed to provide comprehensive auto insurance at fair and affordable prices," he said.

Meanwhile, along with the City of Winnipeg's 311 call centre and a couple of other office tenants including Veterans Affairs, MPI's Cityplace operations bring about 2,000 workers downtown every day.

"This is a landmark building downtown," Smiley said. "The entire six blocks around Cityplace has blossomed in terms of downtown activity. We are proud to be part of this downtown energy."

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BOMA Awards of Excellence:

Pinnacle Award for Innovation: Camfil Farr (Canada) Inc.

Building Operator of the Year: Fred Dodd (Manitoba Lotteries Corp.)

2012 Earth Award, in eight categories, recognizing Building Environmental Standards, a leading environmental certification for buildings in Canada:

Corporate Facility: Cityplace (333 St. Mary Ave.), Triovest/Manitoba Public Insurance

Enclosed Shopping Centre: Grant Park Shopping Centre (1120 Grant Avenue), Primaris Retail REIT

Government, less than 100,000 square feet: St. Mary's Road Claim Centre (930 St. Mary's Road), Manitoba Public Insurance

Multi-Use Building: Winnipeg Union Station (123 Main Street), Via Rail Canada

Office, less than 100,000 square feet: 161 Portage Ave. East, Bentall Kennedy (Canada) LP

Office, 100,000 to 250,000 square feet: MTS Place (333 Main Street), Artis REIT

Office, 250,000 to 500,000 square feet: Richardson Building (One Lombard Place), Bentall Kennedy (Canada) LP

Office, 500,000 to one million square feet: 360 Main, Artis REIT

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