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# Legal Aid office goes Broadway

## Agency becomes rebuilt building's anchor tenant

By: **Murray McNeill**

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*Trevor Hagan / Winnipeg Free Press Joe Banfield of Banfield Office Properties Group and Legal Aid chairman Mario Santos in the new space on Broadway that Legal Aid will move into in December. The building at 287 Broadway is being refurbished inside and out, from top to bottom. Legal Aid will also open small community law offices scattered around downtown.*

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The Broadway area no sooner loses one major government office tenant than it gains another.

Legal Aid Manitoba (LAM) chairman Mario Santos has confirmed the agency is leaving the Somerset Place building at 294 Portage Ave. to become the anchor tenant in a refurbished office building at 287 Broadway.

The news comes just a week after the province confirmed that in early 2013 it will be consolidating eight Housing and Community Development department offices at the soon-to-be refurbished Canada Building on Donald Street just north of Ellice Avenue. Two of those offices are located at 363 and 280 Broadway.

Santos said not all of LAM's operations will be making the move to Broadway in early December -- just administration staff, the IT department, child protection staff, the application centre and five duty counsel. They will occupy about 20,000 square feet on three floors in the six-storey building on the northwest corner of Broadway and Smith Street.

Santos said about 30 of the agency's family-law and criminal-trial lawyers will be moving to eight small community law offices scattered around the downtown. Those moves should be complete by the end of January.

The community offices will each be about 2,000 square feet. One will be in the Somerset Building, but Santos wouldn't say where the others will be because some leasing agreements still have to be inked.

He said Legal Aid is decentralizing and relocating its operations to save money, although he wouldn't say how much.

He said its lease at 294 Portage Ave. is expiring, and the landlord was planning to upgrade the building, which would have meant an increase in rent.

Also, LAM officials wanted to return to a decentralized operating model to avoid future conflicts of interest. He noted if there are a number of co-accused in a criminal case and they all qualify for a Legal Aid lawyer, the lawyers can't come from the same office. Only one can, and Legal Aid has to appoint lawyers from the private bar to represent the others.

Having eight law offices instead of one should reduce the number of conflicts, he said, and allow Legal Aid to use its own lawyers on more cases.

He conceded that maintaining nine offices will be more expensive, but those additional costs should be more than offset by the savings in legal fees.

"So at the end of the day, we're doing this to save money. We're not doing this to be in a different building."

Santos said LAM almost kept its head-office operations in Somerset Place. It looked at eight downtown buildings during an exhaustive two-year search, and the Somerset made the final short list of three, he said.

The real estate agent who brokered the LAM deal -- Joe Banfield of Banfield Office Properties Group -- said in addition to the rents being a little higher at Somerset, it also would have been difficult for Legal Aid to remain in the building while the upgrades were being done.

"It's so disruptive for the tenant."

He said the renovations to 287 Broadway will be complete by the time LAM moves in. And while the building is 55 years old, Banfield said it will essentially be a new facility once the owner -- Inlett Properties -- completes the multimillion-dollar upgrade.

"The degree to which Inlett is going (to refurbish the building) is phenomenal. Literally, the only thing being kept is the concrete and steel."

Inlett spokesman Doug Russell confirmed the 65,000-square-foot building is being refurbished top to bottom, inside and out.

"It's all new construction. Everything has been taken out and it's all new going in."

Although Inlett announced its intention to refurbish the building shortly after acquiring it in 2009, the work didn't get underway until February of this year, Russell said. And while the LAM space will be ready by early December, work in some other areas of the building likely won't be complete until next March or April.

He said three tenants remained in the building during the renovations, and another -- Forensic Psychological Services -- moved into its new fifth-floor space this past summer.

Once LAM moves in, there will only be three small pockets of space -- about 2,000 square feet each -- left to lease, Russell said.

Know of any newsworthy or interesting trends or developments in the local office, retail or industrial real estate sectors? Let real estate reporter Murray McNeill know at the email address below or at 697-7254.

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Old made new

Inlett Properties' 55-year-old office building at 287 Broadway is undergoing a top-to-bottom refurbishing. Here are some of the changes being made:

- Most of the interior has been stripped down to the bare walls, the asbestos insulation has been removed, and new insulation has been installed.
- The mechanical systems -- heating, cooling, lighting, electrical and plumbing -- have been either upgraded or replaced.
- The building is getting a new roof, windows, elevators, washrooms and entranceway and main-floor lobby area.
- The basement is being converted into an 18-stall parkade, with the entrance off the back lane. There will also be seven outdoor parking stalls.
- A new curtain wall is being installed on the Broadway (south) and Smith (east) sides of the building. The other two sides will get either new cladding or new paint.

Total cost of the renovations has not been disclosed.

-- Source: Inlett Properties

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