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# Itching to move in

## Brothers add 75 downtown apartment units as vacant buildings redone

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JOE BRYKSA / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS [Enlarge Image](#)

*The new Avenue building.*

A handful of reporters has Jamie Hall pinned up against the kitchen counter and are peppering him with questions.

In less than two weeks, the downtown nightclub employee and part-time writer will be moving into his chic new apartment in one of the city's most talked-about downtown revitalization projects -- the \$12.4-million conversion of the long-vacant Avenue and Hample buildings on Portage Avenue into a modern apartment/commercial complex.



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*Inside a suite in The Avenue. (JOE BRYKSA / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS )*

Hall and several other tenants were on hand Tuesday to field questions from reporters as part of the grand opening ceremony for The Avenue on Portage and The Avenue West, as the two buildings are now called.

Hall said he can't wait for the city to issue the occupancy permit so he can move into his one-bedroom suite, which faces onto an interior courtyard.

"I love it!" Hall said of the modern, open-concept design, with its stark white kitchen cabinets, black granite countertops and a bright orange dividing wall separating the living room from the bedroom. "And I really like the deck (the wooden deck off the living room)."

Fellow tenant Brian Chipman is also counting the days until he takes possession of his sixth-floor, one-bedroom suite, which

faces Portage.

"I work downtown and as soon as I saw they were going to convert it (the Avenue Building) into apartments, I knew I had to be here," said the 26-year-old event co-ordinator with True North Sports and Entertainment Ltd. and nephew of Winnipeg Jets Governor Mark Chipman.

"It's one of the most exciting things that's happened in my life."

Chipman said he's not worried about the street noise on Portage.

"I'm up on the sixth floor, so I don't think there will be a ton of noise."

And Hall said downtown safety -- something else the reporters were also curious about -- was a non-issue for him.

"The downtown has been revitalized in the last few years. I walk around downtown all the time and there's no concern."

Premier Greg Selinger and Mayor Sam Katz were on hand for Tuesday's event, singing the praises of the new complex and Mark and Rick Hofer, the developer brothers who turned two former eyesores into the new poster child for downtown renewal.

Selinger described the Hofers as "very brave and pioneering developers," while Katz told media and guests, "This is exactly what we need downtown."

Mark Hofer, the more outgoing of the brothers, said, "Today is a huge day for us. We've had a big passion for the downtown for a long time."

He stressed that the redevelopment would never have happened without the roughly \$3.8 million in financial assistance from the city, the province, and the city's downtown development agency -- CentreVenture Development Corp.

This is the third downtown heritage building redevelopment the Hofers have tackled. The others were the conversion of a former warehouse on Pacific Avenue into an office building and the conversion of another nearby warehouse on Princess Street into The Edge apartments.

The Hofer brothers already have a couple of smaller projects lined up.

One involves converting the basement of The Edge into six apartments, which should only take a couple of months. And the other involves erecting a new apartment block on some vacant land they own in the suburbs.

But that's just to keep them busy until they can find another downtown project to tackle.

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20 units down, 55 more to go

ALTHOUGH Tuesday marked the grand opening of The Avenue on Portage and The Avenue West, it will likely be a couple more weeks before tenants begin moving in.

Developers Mark and Rick Hofer said the final safety inspections still have to be done before the city can issue an occupancy permit.

But they expect that can be completed within a week or so, and the residential tenants can begin moving in by April 15.

And it's likely going to be April 23 before Employment Solutions for Immigrants Inc./Manitoba Starts, the not-for-profit agency that has leased the ground floor of the Avenue Building and the bottom three floors of the Hample Building, can take possession of its space, Rick Hofer said.

He said crews are still busy developing the space to meet the agency's requirements.

Sabrina Treyturik, leasing manager, said only about 20 of the 75 apartments have been leased. But she's confident the rest will soon be taken, especially now that the scaffolding has been removed to reveal the mirror-finished aluminum-clad archway stretching across the front of the two buildings.

"Since they took that down (on Monday) my Twitter account has just exploded," Treyturik said.

"People are hopping on the bandwagon."

She said most of the tenants who have signed up so far are single, urban professionals -- the kind of people experts have predicted would be attracted to living downtown.

"But there are a few couples who are also very interested in living downtown because they work close by," she said.

All but eight of the apartments are one-bedroom units. The rest have two bedrooms. Treyturik said units range from 400 square feet to just over 1,000 square feet. Rents begin at \$925 a month, with the top-end still to be determined.

The basement of the buildings has been converted into an underground garage, with 37 stalls.

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