

Winnipeg Square gets an update

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New owners give 28-year-old mall a \$3-M facelift

By Murray McNeill

THE new owners of Winnipeg's largest underground shopping mall — The Shops of Winnipeg Square — are putting their stamp on the property with a \$3-million facelift for the mall and the lobby area of the adjoining Commodity Exchange Tower.

Toronto-based Crown Realty Partners acquired the mall and 32-storey office tower last September from Oxford Properties Group and GE Capital Canada Inc., and it's wasted no time in investing on upgrades.

It got the ball rolling by installing new high-efficiency lighting in the mall and office tower, as well as in two other office buildings it acquired in 2006 at 333 Main St. and 191 Pioneer Ave. That project, the cost of which has not been disclosed, began last fall and was completed this past summer.

Then in June, work got underway on the \$3-million facelift for the mall's concourse and the office tower's main-floor lobby area. That project, which includes installing new light-colored flooring and replacing some wooden and brick walls and fixtures with glass walls and stainless steel fixtures, should be complete by mid-November.

"When Crown buys a property, we like to make an immediate impact," Frank Sherlock, Manitoba vice-president of the partnership's property management arm — Crown Property Management Inc. — said in an interview.

Sherlock noted Winnipeg Square and the tower, which will be renamed 360 Main Street — were both 28 years old when Crown acquired them.

"They've held up very well, but it was time for a change," he said. "You have to maintain the buildings and you have to keep up with the times, especially in retail. We also have a very strong tenant base and we want to maintain that base."

Winnipeg Square may not be the only local underground shopping mall that's getting a facelift. Industry sources say one is also in the works for the nearby Lombard Concourse, located beneath the Richardson Building and the Fair-



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Frank Sherlock of Crown Property Management at the Shops of Winnipeg Square.

mont Hotel.

However, tenants and a spokesman for the firm that manages the concourse — Lombard Place Ltd. — refused to discuss the plans when contacted on Friday, saying nothing has been settled.

The upgrades to Winnipeg Square and the Commodity Exchange Tower will serve a dual purpose. Not only will they give the concourse and lobby area a brighter, more modern look, but they'll also enable Crown to achieve additional energy savings within the sprawling complex, which covers a one-square-block area on the southwest corner of Portage and Main.

Sherlock said the new lighting system will reduce the complex's electrical consumption. And the lighter-colored floors, walls and fixtures will make the interior brighter and allow Crown to cut down on the number of lights it keeps on during the day.

He said that's important because the complex was recently certified as

a green building under the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) of Canada's Go Green program. In keeping with that new "green" approach to building management, all 186 tons of concrete and floor tiles that have been removed from the buildings will be recycled as road-building material, rather than dumped at a landfill. And 99 per cent of the cardboard packaging the new floor tiles arrived in — the equivalent of roughly 2,100 boxes, or 240 kilograms of cardboard — also will be recycled.

To create as little disruption as possible for the buildings' tenants and their customers, Sherlock said all of the renovations are being done at night when the shopping centre and office building are closed.

He noted that 10,000 people pass through Winnipeg Square each week, "so it would be very disruptive if we were doing the work during the day."

He said the mall, which has 49 shops, and the tower, which includes 30 floors



HANDOUT PHOTOS



Pictured above is an artist's rendition of what the lobby of the present Commodity Exchange Tower will look like after renovations. The old decor, pictured below, includes signage and logo that will be replaced now that the tower is being renamed 360 Main Street. The Commodity Exchange Tower and adjoining Shops of Winnipeg Square, the city's largest underground mall, were built by Trizec and completed in 1979.

Before and after

Here are some facts and figures about The Shops of Winnipeg Square and the Commodity Exchange Tower:

Location: Southwest corner of Portage Avenue and Main Street
Opening date: 1979
Original owner: Trizec Corp. Ltd.
Current owners: Crown Realty Partners, Artis Real Estate Investment Trust, and a publicly traded European company
When they acquired it: September 2007

Property manager: Crown Property Management

Size of buildings: The underground mall is 60,000 square feet in size and the 32-storey office tower is 540,000 square feet

Number of shops in mall: 49

Occupancy rate: About 95 per cent for both buildings.

Cost of facelift: \$3 million

Start of renovation work: June of this year

Projected finish: mid-November

— Source: Crown Property Management

of office space and two floors that are used for storage and to house the building's mechanical equipment, both boast a 95 per cent occupancy rate.

"We have a couple of vacancies right now (in the mall), but for the last 10 years we've always been over 95 per cent leased," he said.

While Toronto-based Crown Realty owns just the four buildings in Win-

nipeg, it's keen to add more office or office/industrial properties to its portfolio.

"Crown views Winnipeg as a good market. It's stable, with good-quality tenants," Sherlock said. "We would like to acquire more properties... but nothing is pending at the moment."

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