

A place for young professionals

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From hotel to high-rise apartments

By Murray McNeill

A LOCAL property development firm is bringing a little New York-styled living to downtown Winnipeg with its extreme makeover of a former downtown hotel.

B & M Land, owned by the husband-and-wife team of Andrew Marquess and Maureen Diamond, is in the middle of an \$18-million conversion of the former York the Hotel on Donald Street to a 180-suite, high-rise apartment block — but not just any high-rise apartment.

This one will boast on-site amenities Marquess claims you won't find in any other Winnipeg apartment block. They include a 95-seat cafe offering catering, takeout and home-delivery services, and a 300-seat steak and fish restaurant and lounge.

Other on-site services being contemplated include a fitness lounge and dry-cleaning pickup and delivery.

Marquess and Diamond said that kind of lifestyle-oriented, high-rise residential development is usually found in larger, high-density cities like New York and Chicago, or Toronto and Vancouver.

But they haven't been in cities the size of Winnipeg, and not at the price points he's talking about — \$900 a month for the 850-square-foot, one-bedroom suites and \$1,200 a month for the 1,220-square-foot two-bedroom units.

"This is a concept you'd have to pay a lot of money for somewhere else...," he said.

Visually, 161 Donald will also sport some of that big-city glam, with a new insulated, glass-curtain wall around the entire building. Not only will that give tenants a panoramic view of the downtown, but it will provide an airtight envelope for the building.

And that's a big deal for Marquess because he'll be using geothermal technology for heating and cooling, which will also set it apart from most other high-rise apartment blocks in the city.

In fact, the only others are ones B & M Land has purchased and redeveloped, including the high-rise block at 33 Hargrave St. and 16 townhouse complexes



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'This is a concept you'd have to pay a lot of money for somewhere else...'

— Andrew Marquess, with partner and wife, Maureen Diamond, in the former York the Hotel

and two low-rise apartment buildings in McPhillips Common near McPhillips Street and Mountain Avenue.

While tackling multimillion-dollar residential redevelopment projects is becoming old hat for B & M Land — this is the 20th one it has undertaken since its launch in 2002 — Marquess doesn't seem to have lost his passion for what he does.

"This is probably one of the most exciting things we've ever done!" he exclaimed during a tour of the gutted interior of 161 Donald.

Looking around at the exposed concrete walls and stacks of lumber and drywall, it's hard to believe the building was once a fancy hotel (the Sheraton Winnipeg before it became York the Hotel), or an apartment block (the House of York, 1970s to early '80s).

But when Marquess looks around, he doesn't see a building in transition. He's thinking ahead to what it will look like when it's finished, and what it will mean for the downtown.

With two restaurants, a lounge, 180 rental suites, and 16,000 square feet of office space, "it has what everyone is talking about from a downtown revitalization point of view," he said. "It (a mixed-use development) is what the downtown needs."

Amen to that, says Ross McGowan, president and CEO of the civic agency in charge of downtown development — CentreVenture Development Corp.

"From our standpoint, the more people you can bring downtown, the better," McGowan said.

The downtown could definitely use more apartments, he said. Particularly ones geared to young professionals, which is who B & M Land is targeting.

"I think the fact he is not receiving any financial assistance (from government) also supports the idea that these projects can be economically viable if the mix is right," McGowan said.

The two new restaurants will be owned and operated by Dale and Barb Yuel, owners of the Tavern in the Park

restaurant in Assiniboine Park.

Barb Yuel said they hope to open their new establishments in early October, after their current lease expires.

"We've really enjoyed our time here," she said, noting the restaurant has been operating in the park pavillion for 10 years. "But it was time for a change... and we're really excited about trying something different."

She said they were drawn to the B & M Land building because they know the owners, they like the location and they want to contribute to downtown revitalization efforts. And having 180 apartments right above them was also an attractive feature, she said.

"I think people are so much busier these days and they don't have time to cook. So if we're right in the same building, they might pop in and pick up something to take up to their suite. Or maybe they'll come down for a meal," she said.

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B & M LAND

Artist rendering of the highrise at 161 Donald St.

Not your average apartment block

Here are some facts and figures about the redevelopment of the highrise at 161 Donald St.:

■ **Who's doing it?**
Winnipeg-based B & M Land, owned by husband-and-wife team Andrew Marquess and Maureen Diamond.

■ **What was there before?**
A 271-room hotel (York the Hotel, formerly the Sheraton Winnipeg). And before that, in the 1970s and early '80s, the House of York high-rise apartment block.

■ **What will it become?**
The \$18-million overhaul will create a mixed-use development with 180 one- and two-bedroom apartments, 16,000 square feet of Class B office space, a 95-seat cafe, a 300-seat restaurant and lounge, and a 200-stall parkade.

■ **What kind of eating establishments will be on-site?**
They'll be operated by Dale and Barb Yuel, owners of the Tavern in the Park restaurant in Assiniboine Park. The cafe will offer a variety of "grab-and-go-style" products, including soups, salads, sandwiches, coffee and desserts. The restaurant will specialize in steaks and fish, but will also offer a variety of other dishes.

■ **When will it be finished?**
The redevelopment began in January and is to be completed by the end of this year. Residential and business tenants are scheduled to move in in early October.