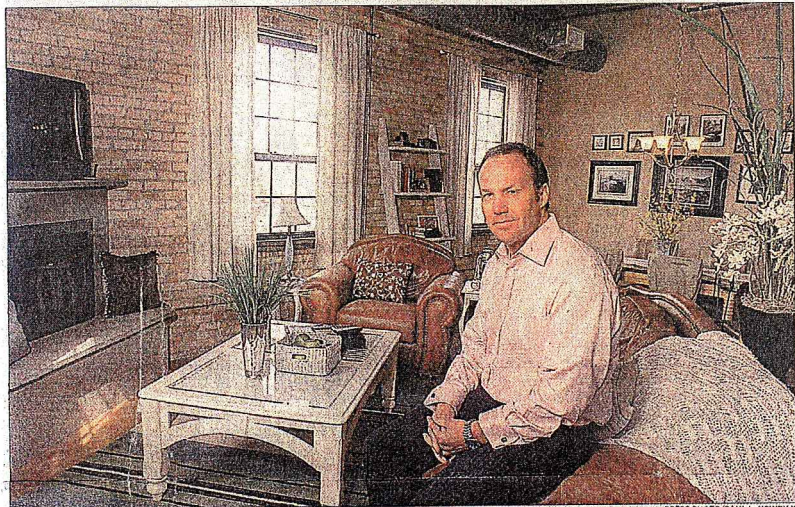


LOW-COST HOUSING IN DOWNTOWN SETTING



PRESS PHOTO/PAUL L. NEWBY II

A change: Developer Jon Rooks is transforming the Boardwalk into condos, with the first models expected to be in place by June. The transition from apartments to condominiums could take several years.

Boardwalk goes condo

GRAND RAPIDS — Downtown's largest apartment complex is going condo, bringing some of the lowest-cost owner-occupied homes to the central city area.

Developer Jon Rooks is expected to finalize purchase of the landmark Boardwalk building, 940 Monroe Ave. NW, later this month, beginning a transition that could take several years.

While the first models are expected to be in place by June, Rooks said he already has 50 preliminary reservations for Boardwalk units.

The former Berkey & Gay furniture factory, with portions dating to 1892, was converted into the Boardwalk in 2001 after a major overhaul by a partnership led by Thomas Beckering, garnering several accolades as a preservation effort.

While neither side would disclose the sale price, the building was listed last year for \$38.5 million. Rooks said \$35 million was spent on the 2001 renovation, backed by historic tax credits.

One of the first noticeable signs of change is expected today when the Waterworks Pub closes after hosting a "Last Drip" party. By May 1 it is expected to be replaced by a new restaurant and pub, J.D. Reardon's.

J.D. Reardon's is owned by Larry Zeiser and Brian Giampapa, who also operate Cambridge House, Graydon's Crossing and Logan's Alley in Grand Rapids. It is expected to open May 1 following renovations to the Waterworks space.

Zeiser said he liked the location and the opportunity to work with

Rooks, who helped develop the Monroe Terrace condos building, where Cambridge House is located. The restaurant is expected to be open from 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. seven days.

"The concept is going to be American bistro style," Zeiser said. "Take the four corners of America and combine that food in an American kind of way."

While the selling points for the old furniture factory include loft-style character, river views in some units and proximity to downtown amenities, the Boardwalk's prices are expected to be a major draw.

Starting at \$69,000 for an efficiency and rising to about \$250,000 for a three-bedroom, two-bath unit, Rooks said the condos will offer the lowest price per square foot among downtown condos.

Association fees are expected to cost between 20 and 27 cents per square foot, or \$150 to \$400 per month.

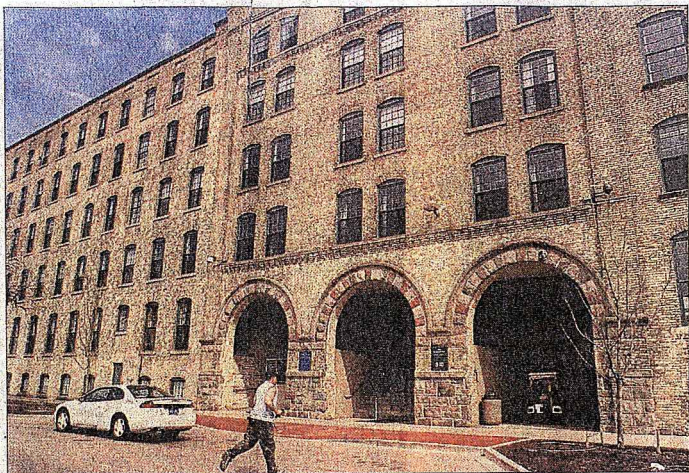
"We're really comfortable with this price ranges because there's a few project in the planning stages and we don't compete with any of them," Rooks said.

As with his other downtown area condo conversion project, Union Square — the former West Middle School — Rooks is putting a heavy emphasis on special mortgages available through National City Bank's N-Champ program.

The program, which is available at other specially designated projects, discounts a typical 30-year mortgage 1.5 percentage points below the market rate, saving a condo buyer thousands of dollars in interest over the life of a mortgage.

Plans are already afoot for renovating the building to add new soundproofing, a theater room, im-

SEE BOARDWALK, C2



PRESS PHOTO/PAUL L. NEWBY II

Change coming: The former Berkey & Gay building became The Boardwalk apartments, and soon it will become condominiums.

BOARDWALK 50 RESERVATIONS ALREADY TAKEN

CONTINUED FROM C1

proved appliances, carpet and trim along with balconies on some units, a pool and Jacuzzi and rooftop deck.

So far Rooks said he has taken 50 reservations for the 230 Boardwalk units. All are being made available to existing residents before being put on the market to the general public.

The goal is attracting and keeping an economically diverse community of young professionals, he said.

"This achieves a lot of the city's goal of getting diversity downtown and retaining young professionals who have been

looking to locate somewhere else in the country," he said.

Chris Beckering, a commercial real estate agent and Thomas Beckering's son, is helping to shepherd the deal for the sellers.

He said the sale follows his father's and other investors' plans for the project.

"The investors got into this as developers, not long-term owners," Beckering said.

Boardwalk isn't the only downtown-area apartment complex converting to condominiums.

Second Story Properties is converting Hillmount Apartments, 505 Cherry St. SE, in the

Heritage Hill neighborhood into low-cost condos.

Some residents already have taken possession of units there, said Sam Cummings, president of Second Story.

Hillmount's 101 units, about half of which have been sold, start at about \$70,000 and go up to \$150,000.

Amenities there include wireless Internet, a rooftop deck and gym.

Hillmount buyers also are eligible to apply for National City's N-Champ or for Fifth Third Bank's no-money down mortgage program.