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http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/102512/buildingSM.png**Port building that has become an icon of renewal in the heart of the city is quickly being restored by owner who continues to bring new life to unused properties**

The former M&I drive-through bank on Washington Street in downtown Port Washington is being purchased by Daniel Ewig and his wife Marie-Ann, who are renovating the former Lueptow's Furniture building a block away.

Ewig, who said he expects to complete the purchase of the drive-through building by Dec. 1, said he plans to raze the structure and create parking on the lot to support the tenants of the Lueptow building, which is being called the Boerner Mercantile Building after its original owner.

Renovations at the Boerner Building are moving more rapidly than originally expected, Ewig said.

"The most surprising finding is how quickly the project is moving," he said, noting the original completion date of October 2013 has now been changed to June.

Two crews have been working on the renovations, one on the exterior and the other on the interior, Ewig said.

The public has had a dramatic view of the exterior renovations as crews have painstakingly removed the brickwork that has covered the original facade since 1969.

"I saw the building and I fell in love with it," Ewig said. "I'm glad people can see it (the renovations) happening.

"We're very happy with the state of the original sandstone facade. While it's slow going getting back to it, clearly the folks who put up the current surface brick took great care not to damage the original facade."

Crews inside the building have also been busy, tearing down interior walls as they gut the structure.

"We've uncovered some really nice original features including the Cream City brick, maple floors and pine tongue-and-groove ceilings," Ewig said.

“The plan is to leave the brick exposed and preserve the floors and ceilings. We want to expose what’s great about the building. I think it’s really cool. I’m really excited about it.”

Patches of the brick, floor and ceiling have been cleaned and stained, giving a hint of what will eventually be the look of the building.

For now, the carpeting still covers many of the floors, protecting the wood underneath from damage during the demolition.

But carpeting never covered the third floor of the building, where “you can see the indentations in the floor from the heavy machines they had here” when Badger Outerwear occupied the building, said Ewig’s brother Dave, who is helping oversee the work.

“Mr. (Merton) Lueptow told us if you look closely, you can sometimes find sewing needles in the cracks on the floor,” he said, adding he has yet to discover one.

New heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems and electrical work will also be installed, Dave Ewig said.

As the interior’s being stripped, crews have uncovered more than 80 windows — not including the Franklin Street side of the building. Ewig said he’s in the process of ordering new windows that will retain the historic look of the building.

“It’s no small task,” he said. “I really think people will be surprised by the amount of light and the views the building offers.”

Ewig said he hopes to have the windows installed by winter, but the remainder of the exterior work — tuckpointing and cleaning of the facade — will likely have to wait until spring.

The demolition work is expected to be completed in the next few weeks, he said, and at that time the sidewalk in front of the building and the alleyways will be reopened.

The construction phase of the project is expected to begin in December, he added.

“The plan is to respect and stay as true as possible to the original exterior,” Ewig said. “On the interior, the plan is to create a very welcoming public vestibule which will serve as the entryway to the entire building, including the upper floors. It’s a really cool design and affords a lot of flexibility to tenant needs.”

Work on the building is being guided by two architects, principal architect Mike Ehrlich and Jim Read, who has expertise in facade preservation and storefront design.

Ewig said his plan is to create space for retail or restaurant operations on the first floor, with office space on the upper two floors.

Ewig said he plans to ramp-up advertising for the structure in the coming weeks, adding that

large banners that showcase the downtown and marina will be placed in the front of the building, where the street-level wall is being removed and replaced with plywood as construction continues.

A number of potential tenants have identified parking as the top need for the building, Ewig said.

Although he purchased a house on Main Street and razed it to create a parking area, that will only provide about 10 spaces — fewer than needed for the Boerner building, he said.

“We’re very excited about the design,” Ewig said, noting there is a significant amount of green space planned for the lot, “but it’s clear we needed to look elsewhere to complete our parking needs.”

The drive-through lot will provide about twice as much parking as needed, he said.

“I’d like to work with the city to offer up more public parking on the west side of Franklin Street in an effort to centralize it and slowly move it away from the lakefront,” Ewig said.

He also said he is excited about plans to work with the city and create a public walkway in the alley on the north side of the building.

“We’re making a considerable investment in terms of window openings on this side of the building, including the lower-level and window wells,” he said. “A major reason for purchasing the property was the potential this space offered in terms of aesthetics and public use.”

Image Information: A WORKER PAINSTAKINGLY removed bricks from the front of the former Lueptow’s Furniture building on Franklin Street — now called the Boerner Mercantile Building — to uncover a stunning facade. The interior of the building is also being gutted, a process that has uncovered the Cream City brick walls, original maple floors and pine tongue-in-groove ceiling that will be restored.