



Artist's renderings from Holly & Smith Architects of Hammond.

Neill Corp. renovates Cate Building for retail, residential apartments

By JOAN DAVIS
Daily Star City Editor

Hammond's west side is joining the downtown renaissance of historic buildings with renovation to the Cate Building, 201 W. Thomas St., into retail space and residential apartments.

The site of Locascio's Hardware in recent years, the building will offer an onsite swimming pool and enclosed courtyard for tenants of the six apartments and a grocery store and another as-yet unnamed retail tenant downstairs.

The apartments will range from 800- to 1,100-square feet in size.

Neill Corporation Chief Executive Officer Debra Neill Baker and President Edwin H. Neill III said the project was the vision of preservationist Edwin Neill II, who died Feb. 28, 2004.

"The building is beautiful, one of the most striking in town," said Edwin Neill III. "For a while we've struggled with what to do with it."

Jennifer Lee, general counsel for Neill Corp., said the elder Neill felt the building should be a catering and event facility.

The owners feel a natural foods market downtown will provide a good balance for all the new retail coming in along Thomas Street.

The market, Organic Planet, is owned by Jennifer Sharp and

Carrie Abel.

Neill III said his company is planning "the nicest apartments in town" with all the amenities, and with a grocery store downstairs, Spoga across the street and Paris Parker on the east side, it's a total lifestyle for downtown tenants.

Holly and Smith Architects are in charge of the plans, and Jim Wall Construction is handling the actual renovation work, he said.

The total investment is \$2 million which does not include the purchase of the building.

The project has been in progress for nearly a year, most of that time spent in the planning stages.

"We're very happy and feel very fortunate to be a part of Hammond, and the community's growth has helped our business," he said. "Edwin (the elder) had a lot to do with the revitalization of the downtown. It's great to do something to improve Hammond and enhance the quality of life here."

EHN2 Holdings LLC, Neill Corporation's real estate holding company, purchased the 12,237-square-foot building in 1996.

Known alternately as The Cate Building, The Ford Building and The Old Locascio Hardware, the Neill Corp. will refer to the property as The Cate Building, Lee said.

Originally constructed by the Cate family in 1919, the building housed a Ford dealership for many years.

Around 1950, Locascio's Hardware occupied the building until the early 1990s when

Dec's Antiques moved in.

The downstairs portion of the building will feature two retail spaces and two apartments with the upstairs featuring only residential spaces, Lee

said.

An outbuilding on the property will also house a residential unit.

All together, there will be six upscale residential units.

Each apartment will feature stainless steel appliances, granite countertops, hardwood floors and decorative concrete, custom showers and an audio/video security system allowing tenants to see and hear guests at the entrance.

Tenants will have access to the Cate Building's pool, sur-

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— Edwin Neill III



HISTORIC PHOTO — This historic photo of the Cate Building is from "Citizens Square: Recollections of Historic Hammond," copyright 1984 by Citizens National Bank, Hammond. The photo is from the personal collection of Judge Leon Ford III.



Shawn Yorks/Daily Star

TODAY — The Cate Building, owned by the Neill Corporation, is being renovated into apartments and retail space, including a natural foods supermarket called Organic Planet.

rounding courtyard and off-street parking, Lee said.

The buildings' architecture is a classic example of the Arts and Crafts style prevalent in construction from the turn of the century to the 1940s.

The style is characterized by the brick form frames at the openings and sign boards, use of geometric patterns, multi-light transoms and double-hung windows.

The renovation will include restoration of original elements and the addition of a few new items, Lee said.

Some elements, like the facade and interior walls, will remain structurally unchanged. Brick work will be repaired, cleaned and sealed and refurbished when necessary.

Some wood, on the storefront, windows and doors, will be replaced.

A canopy to protect pedestrians from the elements was removed years ago and will be reintroduced.

The commercial retail units should be complete and businesses occupying them around October, and the residential

units should be ready to lease in early spring 2008, Lee said.

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