

Jackson Square joins downtown neighborhood

Jennifer DeWitt | Posted: Tuesday, December 20, 2011 7:01 pm

Jackson Square — the newest neighbor in downtown Rock Island — is rich in history, but the new housing project's completion also showed it is even richer in community support.

More than 100 city, business and community representatives were on hand Tuesday as Jackson Square opened its doors to reveal the results of what developers called “the most visible redevelopment” yet by Rock Island Economic Growth Corp., or Growth.

Long known as the Illinois Oil Co. building, the site was transformed into a 30-unit housing complex as the result of many partnerships.

“This truly is a community effort,” said Brian Hollenback, president of Renaissance Rock Island, the parent organization of Growth. The “enormous effort,” he added “was about so much more than just the rehab of a building.”

The project was first identified in the city's 2007-2010 Downtown Strategic Plan. It began a path to reality with Growth's purchase of the building in 2010 from the Jackson family, for whom the new complex is named.

Hollenback said the project involved a complex financing package, including funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Other partners on the project include the City of Rock Island, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. and Illinois Environmental Protection agencies, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Modern Woodmen Bank (mortgage). The development team included Bush Construction, Southwest Design Associates, EnviroNet, Applegate & Thorne-Thomsen and Pioneer Property Management.

“This development best represents a community coming together to do what is right for a neighborhood,” he said.

The \$8.8 million project, funded with public and private funding, was one of the most complex projects yet for Growth, he said, citing challenges with demolition, environmental issues, historic preservation concerns and new construction.

“It's also one of the most visible developments we've had — at the foot of the Arsenal bridge,” he said.

Rock Island Mayor Dennis Pauley said Jackson Square “is the next step” in the continued redevelopment of downtown. “We stand together celebrating the legacy of this building's past, and its new beginning as Rock Island's newest development to house hard-working households,” he said.

A.J. Loss, president of Bush Construction, the project's general contractor, recalled his first walk-through of the building. “I looked around and said ‘Wow. This is going to be a challenge.’ ”

Just a year after construction began, he said “It was a very challenging, but rewarding, project.”

Hollenback said 13 rental applications have been approved, but they still are taking applications.

During building tours, visitors saw apartments — each with its own unique building elements — and other amenities. To give the building an urban feel, sections of the original brick walls have been left exposed as well as beams and duct work.

“The redevelopment of the Jackson Square site is a long-term investment in the quality and condition of the local housing stock,” Hollenback added.

Citing estimated based on data developed by the National Association of Homebuilders, he said the project created 51 full-time jobs, \$2.37 million in local incomes as well as income to local business owners, government and taxes.

In addition the project has spurred more investment in the Arsenal Gateway. Among the projects are the planned demolition of blighted properties in the area, \$4 million investment by neighbor Mandus Group/Spirit Partners, a \$1.2 million expansion next year by Bent River Brewery, and a new Children's Garden near the Quad-City Botanical Center and north of Jackson Square.