

Building projects have downtowns

Looking good

Major projects nearing completion

By Tim Krohn

tkrohn@mankatofreepress.com

As the new year begins, the downtowns of Mankato and North Mankato will see completion of major projects that will solidify the years-long effort to revive the cities' core.

"The city center is the signature of the community, it's what people remember," said Todd Loosbrock, president of U.S. Bank. The bank is at the center of two major changes as it has sold its building to the city for a planned civic center expansion and will be moving its 35 employees across the street to the renovated HECO building by early June.

"I think this will be the flagship building," Loosbrock said of the soon to be named U.S. Bank Center.

The first floor will feature the retail bank operation with an upper floor for offices. I&S Group already occupies part of the upper floors of the building, which will also feature several condos. The city is creating a task force to plan for expansion of the civic center, which will depend on the city's success in getting bonding money from the Legislature.

Tentative plans call for renovation of the existing civic center hockey facilities and new multi-use convention and business center space where the bank sits.

The other linchpin in downtown revival involves some 80 Mayo Health System employees

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Photos by Pat Christman

U.S. Bank President Todd Loosbrock outside the bank's current drive-up area with the soon-to-be US Bank Center building (formerly the HECO building) getting finishing touches in the background.



Workers are finishing installing panels on the former Northwestern office tower in downtown Mankato. Mankato-Mayo Clinic Health System will soon be moving administrative offices into the building.

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who will move into the former Northwestern Office Building on Second Street.

Finishing touches are being put on a major renovation of the building.

"Having that many people down here looking for places to eat and shop, it creates energy downtown," Loosbrock said.

"There's so much cool stuff going on down here, it seems like a new era."

The latest projects come on the heels of a renovation of the Graif Building, construction of a new parking ramp, ongoing expansion of the Law Enforcement Center and upgrades to several smaller buildings.

Loosbrock said the key to success has been investments by the cities and private developers and the creation of the City Center Partnership, a coalition of downtown business and building owners.

Across the river, North Mankato's downtown has seen construction of the Marigold Building and a new office for Brunton Architects. The former Big Dollar Store is slated for major renovation this year as a retail and housing complex. And the former Happy Dan's on Belgrade has been purchased and is reportedly to reopen as a convenience store.

"When you get the city center in both cities vibrant, it supports more retail and more employers moving down," Loosbrock said.

U.S. Bank traces its roots to the first bank in Mankato, First National, which opened in the spring of 1868 when Mankato's population was 2,000. The bank moved in 1876 and again in 1913, into the space that is now the Ellerbee Room in the Verizon Wireless Center complex.

The current U.S. Bank location was built in the 1960s.

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