

January 24, 2009

Historic apartments to be restored

The Canopic Building, completed in 1906, will see \$4 million in restoration work.

By KEITH ROYSDON

kroysdon@muncie.gannett.com

MUNCIE – One of downtown Muncie's historic buildings is about to get a \$4 million restoration to create new apartment living space.

The Canopic Building – also known as the W.W. Shirk Building -- in the 200 block of East Jackson Street is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Completed in 1906 after several years of construction, the building has been empty for four years.

Developer Duane Miller of Flaherty and Collins Properties of Indianapolis bought the building in a tax sale. The most recent owner, Miller said, was a holding company from Maine.

"Our plan is to do a full-blown restoration of it, and I got historic tax credits on it," Miller said.

Work has already begun on the three-story building's 24 units. Commercial space on the first floor -- formerly home to businesses including Muncie Typewriter Exchange -- will also be turned into apartments, with a goal of completion by the end of 2009.

Miller said the budget for the project is \$3.8 million to \$4 million.

The Canopic project comes just a few days after Bloomington businessman Peter Dvorak had an open house to attract tenants for his \$10 million project to renovate the Roberts Hotel downtown and turn that historic structure into apartments.

The new development means more than 80 new apartments could be available downtown within a year.

The Canopic – a brick and limestone building in the Italian Renaissance architecture style -- saw fairly steady leasing of its apartments up until the past few years. But the vacant first-floor commercial space prompted many to think the building was empty even before it was.

Demolition of the building was discussed in the 1980s, but the structure escaped the wrecking ball. Miller said the building was in rough shape before the recent renovations began.

The Canopic's apartments were considered among the best in downtown Muncie in its heyday, according to information submitted at the time of its nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The apartments are long and narrow, and most run the depth of the building.

The apartments feature hardwood floors and many wooden fixtures, including fireplaces and built-in cabinets. Parts of the building have skylights that will be refurbished, Miller said.

"We're preserving the same look," he said.

Miller said he doesn't consider his project -- aimed at apartment-dwellers of varying incomes -- to be competition for the upscale apartments planned for the Roberts Hotel.

"Their plan is to be more luxury apartments," Miller said. "That will help my site. To see the Roberts development, to see the [Defur Voran] law firm building go in, it's been neat to see that downtown development. It's easier to take an investor through town and show them that money is being invested in Muncie."

Miller has experience with Muncie housing projects. He was the master developer, for Flaherty and Collins, for the Millennium Place apartments along Madison Street and the Howard Square affordable apartment redevelopment downtown.
