

A New Life for an Old Building

Once condemned, the old MacKay building will again stand tall with a new name and makeover.

BY GARY L. MARTIN

The McKinley Tower Apartments may not sound familiar to many long-time Anchorage residents, but most of them would know it by sight.

Located downtown, at the intersection of Denali Street and East Fourth Avenue, that 14-story structure was once pink, and is better known as the MacKay Building, Anchorage's first high-rise building.

Although it has been used for a couple different purposes during its 53-year history, Marc Marlow, the current owner, is returning it to its original application as an apartment complex.

ITS HISTORY

It was constructed in 1952 as a HUD 604 apartment building to relieve the housing shortage caused by the war. After it was damaged in the 1964 earthquake and sat for a while, Neal MacKay bought the building, refurbished it and turned it into an office complex for the Alaska state government.

The state moved out in 1982, when the building failed to meet fire codes and was condemned by the city. From that time, it remained uninhabited, until Marlow obtained the building in 1998. Last year, he contracted with Unit Co., an Anchorage-based construction company, to do an extensive makeover and bring the structure up to code for fire and earthquakes.

QUAKEWRAP

Construction workers currently are using a relatively new technique to reinforce the original structure of concrete and steel. They are using QuakeWrap, a composite fabric that is made of fiber and carbon, and attaches to support

columns and buttressing walls with epoxy resin. This material is touted to be twice as strong as steel.

APARTMENTS AND ASSISTED LIVING CENTER

Besides a neighboring, unattached, new four-story apartment structure for low-income seniors, McKinley Tower Apartments will encompass a 58-unit assisted-living facility in the bottom four floors of the tower.

According to Marlow, the remaining 10 floors will have 30 studio apartments, which will rent for about \$720 a month and 70 one-bedroom apartments that will rent for about \$850.

WORK IS ON TRACK

"Things are moving right along," said Bret Brownfield, project superintendent for Unit Co. "We are on target, and I think we will be done sometime in May of next year and it will be ready to be inhabited before summer. The building should have windows and be painted before winter arrives; we'll continue working right on through until it's done.

"Right now, we are still putting the structure back together. Before the project is done, there also will be a two-story parking structure out in back and a small (senior housing) addition on the west side of the building."

THE MONEY

Brownfield said that until now funding has been a problem. In 2002, Unit Co. started a remodeling project that would have turned the building into a hotel, but a lack of sufficient funding put the brakes on that effort.



Photo by Gary L. Martin

Bret Brownfield, project superintendent.

Marlow said he is now confident that this project will be a success, much to do with his government-backed loans totaling \$17.3 million. Of that total, \$5.4 million is from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that will cover the one-bedroom and studio apartments on the top 10 floors.

The Alaska Housing Finance Corp. has provided \$5.4 million for the redevelopment of the first four floors, which is the assisted-living section of the project. And HUD also is providing another \$3.6 million for the new four-story apartment structure on the west side.

OLD BUILDING, NEW FACE

When the project is finished and ready to be inhabited, there also will be a new two-story parking facility for its tenants.

So, by next summer, the former MacKay Building will both look like a new structure and have a new name. The McKinley Tower Apartments will be ready to begin another 50 years of history. □