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Martingale Wharf LP, Ricci Const. and TMS Architects start 50,000 s/f mixed-use Portsmouth waterfront project

July 02, 2008 - Northern New England

Developer Martingale Wharf LP Inc. has started construction of a 50,000 s/f mixed-use downtown waterfront project. Owners Butch and John Ricci of Ricci Construction have teamed up with TMS Architects to design this redevelopment of the historic Martingale site.

The project is extremely challenging because the construction will take place in a 10,000 s/f area in the heart of downtown Portsmouth's active waterfront retail and restaurant corridor. According to Butch Ricci, "This project will be one of the most difficult, that we have undertaken. We've been working on this for almost five years, and every time I come down here I find something new. Basically we're building to the property line, front and back, and within four feet of the abutter. So it's extremely challenging."

The project, in development for almost five years, has had many obstacles to overcome. Ricci Const. has had to create and submit a construction management plan to the city of Portsmouth for its evaluation and approval prior to obtaining a building permit. Included in the plan were details regarding traffic flow, delivery routes and road changes. "I believe the plan makes the project as unobtrusive as possible. We're going to have police out there monitoring traffic as we need to have good traffic flow during the construction," he said.

Bow St., which is now a thriving commerce center on the waterfront, has had a long and colorful history. The Ricci's father bought the property where the expansion is currently taking place in 1978. "We weren't allowed on Bow St. when we were in high school. That was for 'women of the evening' and a lot of other things like that," said Butch, who co-owns RRJ Properties and Ricci Const. with his brother. "In 30 years, the street has really transformed itself."

The project will fill in gaps on either side of the current Martingale Apartment building at 99 Bow St. with restaurant, retail and office space. Margaret O'Brien with CB Richard Ellis, exclusive leasing agent for the project, believes that this location will attract restaurateurs who want to take advantage of the incredible waterfront location in the heart of the downtown area. The unique topography of the site provides prospective tenants with three levels of prime waterfront real estate along with a penthouse level with its own private deck. A restaurant can take advantage of the multi-level configuration and, as the space is under construction, will be able to easily customize their space to their exact specifications. Retail spaces are available from 1,200 s/f up to 30,000 s/f. The dual frontage on Bow St. and the waterfront deck on the Piscataqua River will attract a wide array of retailers.

The project will offer office tenants the same unparallel water views and ability to customize their space as the retailers, while taking advantage of the unique historic features of the exposed brick and beams of the existing Martingale.

Construction is underway with an anticipated occupancy date of October 2009. CB Richard Ellis

reports that there is already a great deal of interest in the project and expects that restaurant and other users will be competing for this prime waterfront space.

"This is a wonderful thing for the city of Portsmouth," said mayor Tom Ferrini. "That, in a difficult economy, we have a development like this that works for our city. The project will provide economic value and improve the tax base."

Ricci Const. brought Maine Drilling & Blasting (MD&B) in to take care of the rock in this very public and congested downtown area. After three weeks of line drilling with two Atlas Copco Radio Remote D7 hydraulic rock drills, Maine Drilling brought in one of their hoe rams to hammer the rock, breaking it apart for removal, in lieu of blasting. Projects such as this one with tight adjacencies to existing structures and systems call for a great deal of technical expertise and thorough planning. "There's a lot of exposure on this project and many variables. Access is very limited and rock removal will be complicated," said MD&B division manager Steve Adams. "On one side we're right up against the Bow St. sidewalk, and on the other is the Piscataqua River. The slope by the river to the pavement is a 30-foot cut. That means once our hoe ram is 30-feet down, the only way out is by barge."

MD&B's reputation is one of putting the right people, the best equipment and the safest procedures in place for each individual project. Their work on this unique project, as with all they undertake, began with their proprietary hazard analysis, and included communication with nearby businesses and citizens to educate and allay worries. MD&B provided a pre-construction site meeting with local residents and provided each with a pre-construction survey of their home or building. MD&B's part in this project is slated for a July 20 estimated completion.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540