

## Lang Tannery building showcases its 'new' look

BY TERRY PENDER, RECORD STAFF

KITCHENER — Business types mingled with bureaucrats and architects with developers in a room steeped in the city's industrial past but bubbling with enthusiasm for the future.

On Wednesday morning, dozens of people gathered for a buffet breakfast in the Lang Tannery building to mark the halfway point in the massive \$30-million redevelopment of the historic property.

So far the Toronto-based developer Cadan has leased out 120,000 of the 150,000 square feet of space available in the first phase — known as the Artisan Building.

"We are very pleased with the way the leasing has been going," Lana Sherman, managing director of Cadan, said.

The second phase includes about 200,000 square feet of space for research and technology firms, restaurants and specialty retail.

"That is looking good, we are very excited," Sherman said. "We have a really strong level of interest in people moving in so it is not at all like some other markets that we have experienced."

At least two large high-tech firms are on track to lease large amounts of space in phase two, Sherman said.

"It's like this community has a lot of old, forgotten buildings that have now come back to life with new technology businesses that are thriving and the whole focus of the community has shifted from old manufacturing," Sherman said.

By early 2010, the second phase of the building should be renovated and ready for the first large tenant in April. Some retail tenants are expected to move in before that.

"This will hopefully be a restaurant that comes out to here so this will be their private courtyard for dining," Roland Rom Colthoff, an architect with Toronto-based RAW Design, said during a tour of the building.

Colthoff was standing in an open area that used to hold a large boiler — the mechanical heart for what was the largest tannery in the British Empire.

"They had to cut the tank into pieces to get it out," Colthoff said.

It is now cleaned up and ready for redevelopment.

"On the second floor there will more openings and office space around there," Colthoff said pointing to the upper floors above the courtyard.

Balzac's Coffee will be taking some space in phase two. That company currently has outlets in Stratford, the Distillery District in Toronto and Liberty Village, also in Toronto.

Rheinhold Lang founded the tannery in 1848. Fire destroyed the original building. The buildings that remain and form what is now called the Tannery District were built between 1896 and 1956 on the block bounded by Charles, Joseph, Francis and Victoria streets.

These buildings once supplied the leather for boot soles and saddles in the First World War and leather linings for aircraft fuel tanks during the Second World War.

Some of the future and current tenants in the building include the Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre, a pharmacy, three doctor's offices, biotech firms and cutting-edge technology companies.

As Colthoff walks some of the old brick and beam corridors, he marvels at the 100-year-old construction methods that can be put to new use today. The Lang Tannery is really a collection of more than 12 buildings.

"It was just added to over time as the industrial processes changed, as their business grew, they just helter-skelter added bits to the building," Colthoff said.

"What we are lucky about is that every bit they added they built like a bunker," Colthoff said. "So we can do almost anything inside, any use can come in."

Much of the work so far focused on a new elevator, washrooms, new heating-ventilation-air conditioning-electrical-plumbing, fire alarms, emergency exits and partial demolition. A new entrance and lobby was constructed off Charles Street for the Artisan Building.

Some parts of the old factory are now stunning examples of old industrial space reclaimed for the new economy. There are wooden floors polished so bright they shine. Light pours in from numerous windows set inside thick walls. Stout wooden beams and posts are everywhere. Exposed pipe crosses the ceilings.

"This is a very basic renovation to it, just improve the electrical standards, improve the life safety systems, improve the heating and ventilating equipment so it is suitable for a wider range of tenancies and try and leave as much of the existing building in place as possible," Colthoff said.

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