

Renovation Innovation

Overhauling city's most venerable structures worth the cost

By Mike Padgett

When history-sensitive architects and developers consider restoring metro Phoenix office buildings dating to the early 1900s, it can become a love-hate relationship.

They often love the designs, with the decorative stone exteriors and art deco lobbies. But they may hate the additional time and expense of complying with strict regulations on historic buildings, and the additional review process involved.

And then there's locating replacement construction materials; updating old buildings to meet today's electrical, plumbing and fire codes; and finding craftsmen with the skills required for the work.

Despite the challenges, two vintage jewels in Phoenix's architectural crown are undergoing renovation.

One is the Professional Building, erected at 15 E. Monroe St. in 1931 with 11 stories. A 12th floor was added in the late 1950s. The art deco building is being restored as the Hotel Monroe, a 150-room boutique hotel scheduled to open in late 2008.

The developer is Grace Communities, which also is constructing 44 Monroe, a 34-story residential condominium complex at 44 W. Monroe St.

Developers Jonathon Vento and Don and Ryan Zeleznak started interior demolition of the Professional Building in early 2007.

The other historic building having new life breathed into it is the three-story Monroe School, at 215 N. Seventh St.

Workers are renovating the 1914 school into the Children's Museum of Phoenix, a nonprofit organization that will be leasing the building from the city, says Chief Executive Debi Gilpin.

The 70,000-square-foot structure's new life is expected to start in early 2008.

Arizona State University will lease 6,500 square feet for a bilingual Early Childhood Center Learning Lab, devoted to teaching children up to the age of 5.

The lab will be supported by ASU's colleges of education, social work and nursing.

Funding sources for the Monroe School include \$10.5 million in bonds approved by Phoenix voters in 2001 and the museum's own \$12.3 million fundraising campaign, co-chaired by Phoenix Suns owner Robert Sarver and Suns Chairman Jerry Colangelo.

at 203 W. Adams St.

The theater was built in 1929 with Spanish Colonial Revival motifs.

Restoration plans were announced in 1990 by Mayor Paul Johnson, who with the City Council backed a plan to build a 20-story city hall that included the theater.

The city hall was completed in 1993, and the restored theater debuted in January 1997.

Westlake says "not many people want to do this kind of work" because of the region's small inventory of historic buildings, as well as a mentality in the local development community that "new is better and old is bad."

In the reluctant category is The Weitz Co., a high-profile contractor that received kudos for its recent renovation of the 1931 Title & Trust Building at 114 W. Adams St. into the 11-story Orpheum Lofts.

The building's art deco elevator lobby and its Moderne design with zig-zag parapet decoration, along with many other original

features, made the renovation a challenge in terms of following historic preservation

rules, says Clay Wells, Weitz's business development manager:

Those rules "are difficult, (but) they're workable," says Vento at Grace Communities. "They add an extra layer of complexity."



ROGER BREWOORT

GARGOYLES AND RULES

When it comes to restoring historic buildings, doing the job right is music to the ears of historical architect Robert Mather and historical preservation director Roger Brewoort, both of Westlake Reed. The company is nationally renowned for its work in that area.

The Sugar Beet Factory in Glendale remains empty despite several proposals to turn the historic structure into a mixed-use development with retail space.

