

Prairie Edge

Entire first floor will become gallery space

By Dan Daly
Journal Staff Writer

The 106-year-old building on the northwest corner of Main and Sixth streets in downtown Rapid City will be restored nearly to its original look, according to its owner.

Rapid City businessman Ray Hillenbrand said the building was now being vacated, but the first floor should be restored and ready to open by June. Next fall, second-floor work will be done.

The entire first floor will become gallery space for Hillenbrand's Prairie Edge, a company that deals internationally in Indian arts and crafts. The vacant second floor will serve as offices for Hillenbrand's arts and crafts, casino management and other

correct, Wilson said, as much as 20 percent of the cost can be recouped as a federal income tax credit.

And under state law, Wilson added, property tax assessors can't increase the assessed value of the newly restored building for eight years after construction is done.

Wilson said private homes, if they meet the guidelines, also can reap property tax benefits. However, only commercial building owners can get federal tax credits.

Requirements are fairly stringent, but Wilson said building owners in general had some leeway in the kind of restoration work. They don't have to turn the building into an exact replica of the original structure.

"Owners are never punished for the sins of the previous owner," Wilson said. "But if you start messing with the storefront, you need to make it historically correct."

Wilson said downtown Rapid City had some good examples of well-done historic restoration work: the Buell Building at Seventh and St. Joseph streets, the Duhamel Building at Sixth and St. Joseph, the storefronts across Main Street from the Prairie Edge building, Black Hills Beauty College on St. Joseph, and the TSP building, formerly the Rapid City Public Library on Kansas City Street.

Hillenbrand did not release cost estimates for the restoration project. A contractor hasn't been hired, he said. But Wilson said the work could cost anywhere between \$500,000 and \$1.5 million.

"That is a lot of money, but generally (preservation) is less expensive than demolition and new construction," Wilson said.

Paul Swedlund, chairman of the Rapid City Historic Preservation Commission, called the project a step in the right direction for downtown Rapid City and an example for other building owners who have false fronts tacked onto historic exteriors.

But Hillenbrand's goal is also to expand the Prairie Edge gallery and its line of Indian fine art. The entire first floor of the building, about twice the space of the existing Prairie Edge, will become gallery space.

"We also hope to include a portion of that space to a local gallery of fine arts for local artists and sculptors," Hillenbrand said.

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— Jim Wilson,
State Historical Preservation Center

business enterprises.

The Prairie Edge gallery, which until last week occupied about half of the Main Street building, has been moved temporarily to rented store space a block away on St. Joseph Street, Hillenbrand said.

RCC Western Stores, a downtown fixture for nearly 50 years, lost its lease on its third of the building and is scheduled to close the downtown store this week.

Hillenbrand and architects at TSP in Rapid City are drawing up plans to restore the building to its original look. Initial plans, he said, have been submitted to state officials for approval. Hillenbrand is seeking tax breaks available for restoration work.

Jim Wilson, restoration specialist with the State Historical Preservation Center, said the tax benefits could be substantial. Wilson is reviewing plans for the Prairie Edge project.

If the reconstruction is historically

owner to restore building



(Above) This undated photo shows the Behrens Furniture and Undertaking building at the corner of Main and Sixth streets in downtown Rapid City sometime around the turn of the century. A more recent photo (left) shows that the building has undergone a number of changes over the years.

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