Plans for Penney building unveiled

Businessman hopes restoration completed by this Christmas

By Dan Daly
Journal Staff Writer

Vacant for 19 years, the former JC Penney building in downtown Rapid City may be back in business for Christmas 1997, said Stanford Adelstein, who bought the building a year ago this month.

The Rapid City businessman unveil plans Monday to restore the historic facades of the group of buildings at 603, 605, 607 and 609 Main St. that will be known as the Penney-Haines Block.

"I think a lot of exciting things are going to happen downtown," Adelstein said. An important step, he said, is for "abandoned buildings to cease to be abandoned."

A Rapid City native, Adelstein also has a strong emotional attachment to that one-block stretch of Main Street. "I've walked past it too many times to walk away," he said.

In May 1986 he bought the long-vacant Penney building and the adjoining Haines Block, which wraps around Neugebauer's Jewelry to face both Main Street and Sixth Street. (The facade on the Sixth Street side, with three street-level stores and apartments above, remains mostly intact.)

Two key pieces of the project recently fell into place, Adelstein said during an interview Monday afternoon.

First, the Social Security Administration has agreed to lease 8,400 square feet of second-floor office space at 605, 607 and 609 Main St., making the project feasible. The first floor of 605 Main St. will soon open as Dakota Interiors, a home furnishings and gift store, and Adelstein's NWE Management Co. is negotiating to lease the first floor of 609 Main to a restaurant.

And second, the U.S. Park Service gave its approval for the storefront renovation plans. Approval is needed because the entire block in a historic district, a designation managed by the Park Service.

Last summer, crews ripped off the old green panels of the Penney building to reveal the original brick- and-stone facades of two buildings that were the original Penney store. The brickwork was mostly intact, but the stone had apparently been gouged up and chiseled off to make room for the green panels.

An architectural drawing from John Link of the Alliance of Architects shows a row of buildings that look mostly the way they did when they were built.

Interior work — including asbestos removal and the addition of elevators — will be extensive. Steve Colgan, in charge of special projects for NWE, said the asbestos work will be the first priority.

Adelstein said he hopes to get started on the project in the next couple of weeks, and have the shops open and rented by Christmas time.

Paul Swedlund, head of the Rapid City Historic Preservation Commission, said Monday that the restoration of the Penney building comes at an important time for downtown Rapid City. On May 8, a block away, downtown lost the historic Sweeney Building in a devasting fire.

"This project shows that downtown can continue to move forward," said Swedlund, who has been involved in getting the Penney design approved. "It's a good thing at a bad time."

Swedlund said the three buildings represent both the older Italianate style of architecture, in the building at 607 Main St., and newer utilitarian style at 605 and 607 Main St.

Lana Brehkus, who handles commercial leasing for NWE, said the remaining retail space in the center could be rented as one large store or broken into smaller shops. The basement, she said, will be rented out as paperwork storage space to insurance companies, law offices and other businesses that want to store records off premises.

When he bought the buildings last year, Adelstein said his biggest concern was the lack of downtown parking. On Monday, he said the discussions by new Mayor Jim Shaw and other city officials about building downtown parking garage are encouraging. "We think that's going to happen," he said.