Building takes shape at Sweeney site

Brick on steel expected soon; downtown structure fills hole

By Dan Daly
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Downtown denizens who just couldn't get used to seeing a hole in the ground where the Sweeney Building used to be can take a measure of comfort these days.

Rapid City

The structure taking shape at the corner of Seventh and Main streets has enough of the former Sweeney Building's architectural touches — like high ceilings and a beveled corner — to almost seem familiar.

In a couple of weeks, when bricklayers are scheduled to start covering the steel skeleton with red brick, it will seem even more familiar to downtown residents, said Mark Blote, owner of the new building.

Few have welcomed the progress more than Blote, who has had to look at that hole in the ground every day since the building was leveled in a devastating May 8, 1997, fire.

"I think it will be a beautiful building," said Blote, who has not decided what to call the building. Contractor J. Scull Construction is running ahead of schedule, and the building should be finished by mid-February.

Blote said the only confirmed tenant is his own retail shop, First Stop Gun & Coin, which is temporarily doing business across the street at 514 Seventh St.

First Stop will be in the corner of the first floor. The shop will have high ceilings, big game trophy mounts and wood floors, much like the old shop inside the Sweeney Building, Blote said.

Three other retail spaces will face Seventh and two others will face Main.

He opted to build a full two-story building on the site, with 16,000 square feet of leasable space on each floor of the building. Another 12,000 square feet of basement storage space is underneath the building.

"It really needs to be two floors, not only for costs, but to fit in with the rest of downtown Rapid City," said Mark's father and business partner, Larry Blote.

The building will remain unfinished for now, Mark Blote said. He hopes to lease the second floor as offices but may turn it into apartments.

A construction worker smooths the second story concrete floor of the new building being built on the site of the former Sweeney Building in downtown Rapid City, above a sign noting the building's expected opening in February of 1999.