Historic downtown building gets new life

By Dan Daly
Journal Staff Writer

The brand new brick and glass building at the corner of Sixth and Main streets in downtown Rapid City must have been quite a sight for local residents in 1897. With a main floor dominated by huge glass windows that appeared to be holding up the imposing brick of the corniced second floor, the structure seemed to defy gravity.

"It was a bold building even for back then," said architect Kent Niemann of TSP in Rapid City, the firm in charge of restoring what will become art galleries, a trading post and offices for Prairie Edge Inc.

The restoration project must be approved by several agencies, from the U.S. Department of Interior to Rapid City planning and zoning, Niemann said.

Architect's drawing of the restoration of Prairie Edge from the street — especially the below-ground work. MAC crews have dug out 2,000 cubic yards of dirt and confining walls. Above ground, they also re-exposed several uses under the same roof.

On the ground floor will be the Native American arts and crafts gallery and studios, which have been temporarily relocated to St. Joseph Street, and the Prairie Edge Trading Post, a new venture. Another new venture will be the second-floor fine arts gallery, featuring local artists.

The second floor will share space with offices for Hillenbrand's ranching, gaming and arts businesses.

"We want to have a complex that is complete and reflective of this area," said Hillenbrand. "Secondly, we're putting something back into the community."

— Steve McCarthy
MAC Construction

Supplies as well as finished goods, books, tapes and music. Its addition will allow visitors to spend anywhere from 50 cents to several thousand dollars. The project began last fall, and Steve McCarthy of MAC Construction Co. said work was well underway.
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As important as the historical significance is the building's usefulness. In the case of Prairie Edge, company president Ray Hillebrandt will have architect's drawing of the restoration of Prairie Edge
derneath the original stone foundation walls.

Above ground, they also re-exposed the old ceilings — 16 feet high on the ground floor. The old ornamental tiles will be cleaned up and replaced. Others are new — but with the same 1880s look.

Niemann said the goal was to retain as much of the original materials as possible: hardwood floors, ceiling tiles in some rooms, and second-floor windows, even the old sash weights.

When completed, the building's exterior will look almost exactly as it did when it was built in 1887 — right down to the eight monstrous glass windows measuring 6 feet by 14 feet.

Each pane weighs 800 pounds, McCarthy said, and a crane will be needed to install them.

New metal cornices are being made by a 150-year-old company in Missouri. Steel ornamental columns — custom made by a Salt Lake City company — will be put in place between the panes. But they will be backed by not-so-ornamental structural steel columns.

McCarthy's company also did refurbishing work on the Elk's Building, the 1915 Firehouse Co. and Buell buildings in downtown Rapid City, and the Lawrence County Courthouse, the Depot Museum, the Deadwood Recreation Center and the Adams Museum in Deadwood.

"Old buildings are fun," he said. "It's sort of removing the 'overburden,'" McCarthy said.

At the same time, crews also must turn it into a modern building, Niemann said designers had to add fire sprinklers, a heating and ventilation system, a new electrical system, lighting, a security system, intercoms, paging equipment, cable TV and an elevator — all without attracting much visual attention.

The Prairie Edge Gallery's first floor will feature 16-foot ceilings and the original hardwood floors.

restore: Light well to grace the interior

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Deadwood Recreation Center and the Adams Museum in Deadwood.

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Crews are restoring a "light well" in the middle of the building. It was designed in 1887 to deliver light and ventilation to interior rooms.

It is a shaft, about 6 feet by 10 feet, that runs from the first floor ceiling to a skylight on the roof of the second floor. On two sides are windows. The light well was sealed off during some past remodeling projects.

"The majority of our work is to undo what's been done in the past — sort of removing the 'overburden,'" McCarthy said.

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