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## NEW NAME, NEW LOOK FOR OLD STRUCTURE

Sunday, November 15, 2009

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When the renovations are complete, the 34-story former AmSouth building will be a tribute to Mobile's famous party of parades — Mardi Gras.

The office building at 107 St. Francis St. has been dubbed the GM building by David Bronner, chief of the Retirement Systems of Alabama, which purchased the building last February for \$6.75 million.

Rather than "MG" for Mardi Gras, owners went with the reverse. Interior décor in the public spaces will salute the purple, green and gold colors of Mardi Gras.

"Dr. Bronner wanted to purchase the building and renovate it for the people of Mobile," said architect Tracy Bassett of Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood's Montgomery office.

"He wants it to be a building that Mobile will be proud of, and one of the things that Mobile is known for is Mardi Gras."

RSA plans to invest millions in renovating and updating the circa 1965 structure, which still has many of the original air conditioning and heating fixtures, according to RSA officials.

The project should be finished by March 2011, according to Steven Timms, director of construction development for RSA.

Repairs to the 480-space parking garage are almost complete, with interior work starting this month on vacant floors in the building, according to Joe Toole, leasing agent for RSA.

The building is about 50 percent leased. Existing tenants will have to move only once; as each floor is finished, the tenants will be moved to new space, he said.

The private Bienville Club will be renovated and remain on the top floor.

Lease rates at the GM building should range from \$15 to \$17 per square foot, according to Toole.

"The AmSouth is a C building, and after renovations it will be a B-plus," said John Toomey of Toomey & Co. He managed the AmSouth building for years and is working with prospective tenants for the GM. "You can never become Class A unless you build brand-new and look like RSA's tower, which is an incredibly great building," he said.

RSA's Battle House Tower offers Class A

office space at rents averaging \$24 per square foot, Toole said. About 80 percent of the tower space is leased, he said.

RSA funded the

\$200 million Battle House Tower and adjacent 238-room Battle House Hotel project off Royal and Dauphin streets, which opened in May 2007. It paid \$11.8 million for the nearby Riverview Renaissance Hotel, then spent \$60 million on renovations.

To modernize the GM building, all windows will be replaced with longer versions featuring a blue mirror tint, according to Bassett, who has worked on many RSA projects here and around the state. His firm has an office in the Battle House Tower.

Like the Battle House Tower, the GM will feature a colorful light show on the building at night, but the GM's will be in Mardi Gras colors.

"The building needed something to liven it up, and we're taking advantage of the color and light and trying to introduce the colors throughout the main lobby of the building," Bassett said. The architects will work with Mobile's Mardi Gras Museum to find art work or photographs that can be tied into the décor.

The exterior entrances will feature mesh screens that resemble ribbons or streamers in honor of the parade season.

Both the Battle House Tower and the Riverview feature custom-designed spires on the top — an RSA trademark in downtown Mobile.

No spire, but there will be some surprises to come on the GM building's final look, according to Toole.

**/cut/2/cBILL STARLING/** Staff Photographer Steven Timms, director of construction development for Retirement Systems of Alabama, left, talks with John McClelland, center, and Kevin Cross, both with Midstream Fuel Services, on Wednesday about the proposed new typical tenant floor plan in the old AmSouth Bank building. New owner RSA is renovating the building inside and out.

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