

The Record



Old school house to become part of Sportsworld redevelopment

December 08, 2009

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KITCHENER — A 120 year old school house will be turned into a restaurant that specializes in meals prepared with locally produced ingredients as part of the development of Sportsworld Crossing.

Intermarket Developments will renovate and restore the Pine Grove School House on King Street East where a restaurant and wine bar will open early next summer.

The old school house was built some time in the 1800s and was slated to be demolished in the original plans for the area's redevelopment.

But when some members of the neighbourhood asked the developer to save the historic building, the Toronto-based company promised to look into it.

"We couldn't commit to anything, but really for the last two years we have been thinking about—how do you rework that building?" Mark Kindrachuk, president of Intermarket Developments, said.

"So one of the first things we did is have an engineer make sure it was structurally sound, and once we had that we got a little more serious," he said.

Kindrachuk loves Balzac's Coffee in the Distillery District in Toronto.

So he took the owners of the Woolwich Arrow Pub and the Borealis Grille and Bar in Guelph to the Toronto café so they could see the possibilities for reclaiming an old space.

"I didn't take them to the sight initially because I thought they would get scared off by the way the building looked," Kindrachuk said of the old school.

"I took them to Balzac's and I showed them the plans and said: 'This is what I think we can do here,'" he said.

"So we are going to do some of the same things at the school house," Kindrachuk said.

An addition will be put on the side of the school house using reclaimed brick from an old house that is being demolished in central Kitchener.

The basement will feature exposed brick walls, stylized windows, a big harvest table, a wine rack covering one wall and live jazz.

"This is a small part of a big project, but in my mind it is the fun part," Kindrachuk said.

People who work to preserve the city's built heritage are doubly thrilled. They like the plans and are pleasantly surprised the developer chose to incorporate the historic building without a fight.

The building, while historically significant, is not listed on the city's register of heritage properties and is not designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.

"It's an interesting project in that it wasn't designated, it wasn't on our radar," Leon Bensason, the city's head heritage planner, said.

That means the city could not force the developer to include the old building in the project, but Intermarket Developments was on side once it was determined the building was structurally sound.

"That was great, especially since we didn't have any legislative authority to back up a request that it be retained," Bensason said.

"I think what we are seeing is a trend to some degree," Bensason said. "The development industry is recognizing the value of retaining some of these buildings. We are seeing it now in plans of subdivision, how they could be used as a focal point in neighbourhood development."

Coun. John Gazzola represents the area on city council and sits on the committee that advises council about heritage matters.

"They are going to sandblast it, they are going to put a bit of an addition on it but they are going to save the whole building and really improve upon it," he said.

"We are fortunate because they could have torn the thing down and we wouldn't have even known the difference," Gazzola said.

The conversion of the old Pine Grove School into a restaurant is part of a large \$100 million redevelopment called Sportsworld Crossing. It includes several premium retail stores and green spaces on a 40 acre site.

The site is bounded by Highway 8, King Street East and Sportsworld Drive. It includes 250,000-square-feet of retail and 300,000-thousand-square-feet of office space.

While the economic slump slowed the signing of new tenants the project is proceeding nicely, Kindrachuk said.

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