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Peoria Construction Company to Begin Development of “The French Quarter of the Midwest”

(Peoria Heights) Michael V. Lewis, owner of Peoria Construction Company, has unveiled plans to develop a two-story, mixed-use (retail/business) complex in Peoria Heights called “Heritage Square.” Lewis, who purchased the site of the former Kelly Avenue Grade School, says construction should begin sometime in March.

Desiring to bring something totally different to this area, Lewis says inspiration for Heritage Square came from the French Quarter in New Orleans. “The French Quarter is just about the most interesting place on earth, architecturally *and* culturally,” Lewis said. “Our goal is to capture its best attributes – its diversity, ornate designs and enduring ability to capture people’s attention. Heritage Square will be *the* French Quarter of the Midwest.” The 75,000-square-foot, two-story structure will feature the Quarter’s Spanish-style wrought ironwork, an open courtyard plaza, and sheltered walkways to accommodate pedestrians in all kinds of weather.

Built in 1916, the Kelly Avenue Grade School was considered too dilapidated for use and was closed in 2001. It had been for sale ever since, but Lewis considered the site ideal for Heritage Square and began taking steps to purchase the property last September. “Due to the presence of asbestos, we have no choice but to demolish the school,” he said, “but we believe this development will add to the special ambience of this community.” He added that EPA guidelines will be followed carefully during demolition, and area residents will be in no danger from the asbestos.

“Peoria Heights is emerging as an area of economic growth and opportunity,” Lewis said. “A healthy, local economy and cooperative village officials have provided an essential foundation for successful individual businesses. As a result, Peoria Heights offers one-of-a-kind owner-operated stores and restaurants.” He explained that those living and visiting the village have already demonstrated support of unique experiences and venues, and he expects Heritage Square to prosper as well.

“It’s my hope that Peoria Heights will become *the* destination spot for a day,” Lewis continued. “By attracting both residents and tourists alike, Heritage Square will add to the village’s economic vitality... a clear benefit to everyone.” He added that tenants from a local, regional and national level are being sought. “I envision a dynamic group,” Lewis said. “Specialty stores, clothing boutiques, casual and fine dining establishments, salons and service businesses... there’s a lot of room for creativity here! Like New Orleans’ French Quarter, we’d like to see an eclectic mix represented that will appeal to all ages.”

Anchored by a financial institution and an insurance company, Heritage Square will offer tenants 1,500-square-foot retail/office spaces, with an option of leasing more than one. Parking is expected to accommodate more than 200 vehicles both on-site and off-street. Interested tenants can go to www.heritagesquare.biz for more information and architectural drawings. In addition, ongoing updates will be available online.

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