

Westin Minneapolis Hotel

BY JENNY WOODS
STAFF WRITER

Mark Swenson's experience with the Farmers and Mechanics Bank building on Sixth Street and Marquette Avenue goes back to his childhood in the early 1960s.

"It was my bank, so I remember as a little boy, a lot of people who were my age had the famous Passbook Savings Account, which was a school program," he said. "You'd come down to this massive lobby and put your \$1.26 in."

More recently, the principal of Elness Swenson Graham Architects Inc. teamed his firm up with a group at Ryan Cos. US Inc., led by Collin Barr, and reinvented the historical property into the Twin Cities' first Westin hotel, which will open the first week of May.

Barr, president of Ryan's Minnesota region, and Swenson began pursuing the project about four years ago. Ryan convinced the owners, Hartford Conn.-based Hart Advisors, to sell, and then secured HEI Hospitality as an owner and operator. Upon completion of the project, Ryan, as 520 Marquette Hotel, will sell the building to HEI Minneapolis.

While the development was a premiere opportunity, Barr pointed out its complexity.

"The challenges were almost infinite with this project," he said. "The primary challenge was simply taking two, separate historic buildings and structures and trying to retrofit those structures from the office-bank use they were intended for into a hotel use."

The transformation involved structural issues in reconfiguring the roof, maintaining and restoring the historic "skin," adding all the restrooms, creating drains and other plumbing issues, and establishing a loading dock in a high-traffic area. Elevators needed to be moved, and some large vault spaces had to be cut through. While the project team wanted to reuse some large vault doors, they didn't work in the location they were in and had to be moved.

"There were three different companies that failed to be able to move the door," Swenson said. "I think the fourth group finally was able to physically move it. That's



how heavy it was."

David Wright, vice president-Commercial Properties Group at Minneapolis-based U.S. Bank Corporate Real Estate and one of the Best in Real Estate judges, at one time managed the property and said he was "very aware" of the challenges that went into the conversion of the property from a bank/office building into a hotel.

"I think the large main floor with the very high ceiling, along with the numerous poured-in-place concrete vaults, made the main floor area a very big challenge to convert," he said. "I think it's a tremendous 'new' look and use for what had become an old and tired building in the middle of downtown."

The redevelopment was controlled under the Secretary of the Interior's guidelines for historic buildings. The developers and ar-

chitects made no exterior modifications to the original 1941 building, stripped the glass curtainwall on the 1963 tower to its original aquamarine patina (it was painted gun-metal gray in the early 1970s) and added a new floor by dividing the 10th story, which was 20 feet high. That allowed the roofline to remain at its original height. The hotel features the original 34-foot vaulted bank lobby and marble staircase, along with historic light fixtures and original artistic glass panels.

"It is a space that's memorable to a lot of people," Swenson said.

The former bank vault on the lower level is now a conference/meeting room, and lower-level bankers' offices were changed into business meeting rooms. The boardroom on the 10th floor was restored into a new Banker's Boardroom with an adjacent king suite hotel

[STATS:]

VALUE:	\$43 MILLION
LOCATION:	520 MARQUETTE AVE., MINNEAPOLIS
SIZE:	214,854 SQUARE FEET
GROUNDBREAKING:	APRIL 4
EXPECTED COMPLETION:	MAY 2007

[PLAYERS:]

SELLER/BROKER: CB Richard Ellis
DEVELOPER: Ryan Cos. US Inc.
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Ryan Cos. US Inc.
HOSPITALITY CONSULTANT: Wischermann Partners
ARCHITECT: Elness Swenson Graham Architects Inc.
INTERIOR DESIGN ARCHITECT: Moncur Design Associates Inc.
ENGINEER: MBJ Consulting Structural Engineers
TAKEOUT PURCHASER/HOTEL OWNER-OPERATOR: HEI Hospitality
LEGAL REPRESENTATION: Dorsey & Whitney, Faegre & Benson
FINANCE PROVIDER: US Bank
TITLE COMPANY: Old Republic National Title Insurance Co.

room — providing sleeping quarters for CEOs or other executives — and high-tech communications and video equipment.

A modern American restaurant, Bank, resides in the former bank lobby. It retains existing millwork of the original bank building and features an open kitchen. Teller windows were used as the kitchen service area. The bank vault on the first floor was made into a wine display vault and former bankers' offices were converted into private dining rooms. The restaurant also has a main dining room and lounges, and a communal table where diners can shake their own cocktails from a craft-your-own cocktail menu and share fondue.

"[My] favorite feature of the entire project is taking a historic three-story bank lobby and fully embracing that to transition that space into a hotel lobby, bar and restaurant," Barr said. "I think it will be one of the most unique and enjoyable spaces in downtown Minneapolis."

jwoods@bizjournals.com | (612) 288-2101

