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[Tobacco Row Lofts To Have Geothermal Heating, Cooling](#)

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By Ron McCrea The Capital Times

Come July, two historic tobacco warehouses in the Bassett neighborhood will take on a new life as Tobacco Row, 61 loft apartments separated by a courtyard where rail cars used to load Wisconsin leaf headed for the Carolinas.

But the lovely cream-brick and limestone buildings, part of the former Findorff lumber yards, will have an ultra-modern distinction: They will be heated and cooled by a system that uses the Earth to regulate the water temperature.

Paul Muench, the project manager for Urban Land Interests, said a closed-loop, geothermal heat pump system seemed ideal for the historic structures, which are at the end of Feeney Court off West Main Street.

"We didn't want to put any penetrations in the beautiful brick," he said Friday. "We didn't want to have mechanical equipment hanging off the building. We didn't want it sitting up on the roof. If you use boilers and chillers, you have to put them somewhere.

"What I'm going to be most proud of when this project is done are the things you don't see. You won't see any of that stuff. The entire heating and cooling system is invisible."

Thirty-six 300-foot vertical wells have been drilled under what will be a surface parking lot, and pipes sent down and then up each one of them.

"In the spring, when we get our thaw, we'll connect the tops of them well-to-well like a daisy chain," Muench said. "There is a pump that is like the heart. The water gets pumped up and down, up and down, through the ground, and then it gets returned and runs through the entire complex like a vascular system. No matter what time of year, that water will come out of the ground at Earth's temperature, which is 54 degrees."

In conventional systems, water has to be heated or chilled mechanically with boilers and fluid coolers. "Here we just ship it out to Mother Earth and it gets reset," Muench said.

This gives the individually controlled heat pumps in the apartments

"savings from the ground up," as the Geothermal Heat Pump Consortium puts it, since they only have to make up the difference between 54 degrees and the desired temperature, whether cool in summer or warm in winter.

Those savings on heating and cooling should be "fairly significant," Muench said. The only power required will be the electricity to run the main pump and the individual ceiling-mounted heat pumps, which are about the size of a small file cabinet.

The loft apartments, which will have high ceilings and exposed brick walls in the living rooms, will have some supplemental baseboard heaters available, "so that if you like to sit next to the window and read a book, you can click it on and get a little bit extra," Muench said.

The hallways of the building will also use a central heat recovery system that will capture the heat from kitchen and bathroom exhausts. "It ejects the air but grabs the heat and introduces it to the fresh air that is coming in to freshen the corridors," Muench said. "The general rule is, you want to pressurize the corridors so cooking smells don't get drawn into them, and you want to exhaust the kitchens and bathrooms."

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Tall timber: Kitty Rankin, director of the Madison Landmarks Commission, said she is "absolutely thrilled" with the adaptive reuse of the warehouses.

"We've been working from before day one to help guide development in that area. Now, with historic tax credits available, it doesn't take much convincing to get developers to do that sort of thing," she said in an interview. Not, she added, that Urban Land Interests needed convincing.

Indeed, the developer took the lead in getting the warehouses listed on both the state and federal registers of historic places, a prerequisite for getting the credits, which Muench said amount to about \$2 million of the \$11 million project.

The warehouses were built between 1899 and 1901, he said. The west building was actually designed by the famous firm of Claude and Stark for the P. Lorillard Tobacco Co. The architect of the east building is unknown. The buildings served as warehouses for Lorillard and later the American Tobacco Co. until the 1930s. Then they became J.H. Findorff and Son buildings where lumber was stored and sold. Most recently, Muench said, a millworker used one of the buildings to build and store new desks for the State Capitol renovation.

Aside from carving out some windows under preservation supervision to meet code, the building's exterior is unchanged. But now it is bright and gleaming. The exterior cream brick was "black from 100 years of soot," Muench said. It was cleaned with soap and water and a high-pressure rinse.

Inside, the high timbers and brick were all lightly sandblasted to remove lead paint. "We were just blessed with what we found under the paint, this orange-ocher wood. It turned out better than our wildest hopes," he said. Heavy timbers -- some appearing taller than trees are allowed to grow anymore -- are spruce and Douglas fir, he said, and there is also some oak in the east building.

When Tobacco Row is completed, the east building will have three floors of 13 apartments each. The west building will have 22 apartments on an upper floor, a marketing office, and a ground-floor interior parking garage with space for 59 vehicles.

Living rooms will have exposed brick and timber; bedrooms will be insulated and drywalled. Loft levels are being built in the larger units. Boardwalks and a landscaped courtyard will separate the buildings. Two private drives -- Lorillard Court and Findorff Court -- will serve the complex.

Muench said the apartments will rent from \$800 to \$2,400 a month, but most will be in the \$1,200 to \$1,500 range. Under the historic tax credit program, the living spaces must remain apartments for five years before they can be converted to condominiums.

A second phase of the project is now being planned for new residential housing on the rest of the former Findorff property facing Proudfit Street and Lake Monona.

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