

# Montgomery Park's big sign goes on tonight

Reborn building to greet first tenant this summer

Innovations abound

Roof will sprout greenery and help recycle the rain

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With the flip of a light switch this evening, the old Montgomery Ward & Co. catalog warehouse will reach a milestone in its transformation into the city's largest office building.

Developers will illuminate the new sign atop the southwest Baltimore building, now called Montgomery Park. The event signifies that construction crews are in the home stretch of work on the offices of the first tenant, the Maryland Department of the Environment, which is to occupy space this summer. "People remember the Montgomery Ward sign, mainly based on its lighted nighttime presence, and we're re-establishing its presence," said Samuel K. Himmelrich Jr., the lead developer.

"What's amazing isn't what we're doing. It was Montgomery Ward that made a strategic decision to come to Baltimore, build this building and employ thousands. We're trying to put it back."

The 1.3-million-square-foot building has been vacant since 1985, and state transportation officials planned to demolish it for a maintenance facility. A couple of years ago Himmelrich decided he wanted to buy it and appealed to Gov. Parris Glendening to intervene.

The building was saved, and now the pieces of the new office complex are coming together. The letters on the Montgomery Park sign, each 12 feet, 8 inches high, were created in the same style as the old Montgomery Ward sign visible to drivers leaving the city on Interstate 395.

Himmelrich said he tried to change as little of the 1920s art deco building as possible in updating it for the Department of the Environment and the building's second tenant, the Maryland State Lottery, which is to arrive in the fall.

The building, at Monroe Street and Washington Boulevard, is getting a substantial overhaul. The Department of Environment and its 900 employees required environmentally friendly and efficient features in their new offices. Himmelrich said the features should save tenants about half on their utility bills.

Dirt is now being poured onto a portion of the rooftop where greenery will grow, helping to contain rainwater and reducing the runoff of tainted water into area waterways. The contained water will be collected in a 10,000-gallon tank and used in the toilets.

The air conditioning will be a chilled water system, in which water is frozen overnight in six tanks on the roof and air is blown over the melting ice during the day. And many of the building materials will be of recycled substances or otherwise environmentally friendly components.

Desks are being made of wheat board. The carpets being laid have been reconstructed out of pieces from an insurance company office in San Antonio. The window panels, 62,000 of them, will be coated so they let in light but not heat.

Like many buildings of its time, Montgomery Park had environmental hazards, such as lead paint, asbestos and old underground storage tanks once used by a gasoline station. Those issues were challenges in financing the project. And compounding the problems were the building's large size and location off the city's beaten path for offices.

"Local banks said no," Himmelrich said.

Financing for the first phase, about \$65 million, comes from a variety of sources. The money pays for cleanup and construction of common areas, including a food court, gym, auditorium and the heating and air conditioning systems. It also pays for the space for the two tenants, which together will occupy about 330,000 square feet.

Money lined up includes: an \$8 million loan from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a \$2 million loan from the state's Brownfields Revitalization Incentive Program, more than \$25 million worth of state and federal historic tax credits and investor equity, a \$4.5 million loan from the federal empowerment zone program, a \$2 million state loan from the Department of Business and Economic Development to remove lead paint, a \$92,000 grant to install the green roof and a \$22.6 million loan from Citigroup's Center for Community Development Enterprise.

The center is the arm of Citigroup that invests in disadvantaged communities. Andrew Ditton, director of the group center, said the Montgomery Park project was not a conventional real estate deal.

"But we don't do conventional downtown real estate development," he said. "We lend and invest for community-development purposes. This fits the bill. This project should get the momentum going in the area."

But Ditton said he believes that the project is not too risky for the Citigroup center because it is backing only the part of the building with tenants and some of the broader infrastructure. The state government tenants and the public financing helped convince officials that Baltimore and the developers were serious about making the office building work.

Ditton said Citigroup, while looking for investment and lending opportunities in the city, would consider lending money to Himmelrich for other phases of Montgomery Park, as well as for a handful of small buildings that the developer owns or leases around the office building.

Himmelrich said he's heard from other companies expressing interest in moving to the building from the suburbs, but none of them have officially signed on to the project.