

A return to the past

Downtown Wabash building, opened in 1920 as a hotel, will become Charley Creek Inn

BY BARRY ROCHFORD
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When the Honeywell Center in downtown Wabash completed a 75,000-square-foot expansion that included a new 1,500-seat theater in 1994, the city cemented its reputation as a place where people could come and watch nationally known acts.

More often than not, though, after watching those acts, most out-of-town visitors got in their cars and headed home because there weren't many places to stay.

Ironically, about a stone's throw away from the Honeywell Center sat a building that originally was constructed as a hotel. But years of neglect and changing uses had left it a shadow of its former self.

The four-story Hotel Indiana first opened May 6, 1920. Over time, the building stopped serving as a hotel and was instead used as low-

income housing, known as the Red Apple Inn. A bar was situated in one corner of the building, and beer logos still can be found on the walls.

Beth Squires Stein, executive director of the Charley Creek Foundation, said the Honeywell Center and local restaurants do much to bolster tourism in Wabash, but, like a puzzle, the city is missing an important piece.

The nonprofit Charley Creek Foundation operates the Dr. James Ford Historic Home and the Charley Creek Gardens in Wabash. A separate organization, 111 W. Market St. LLC, was formed to purchase the Red Apple Inn and renovate it into something that complements the city's existing attractions.

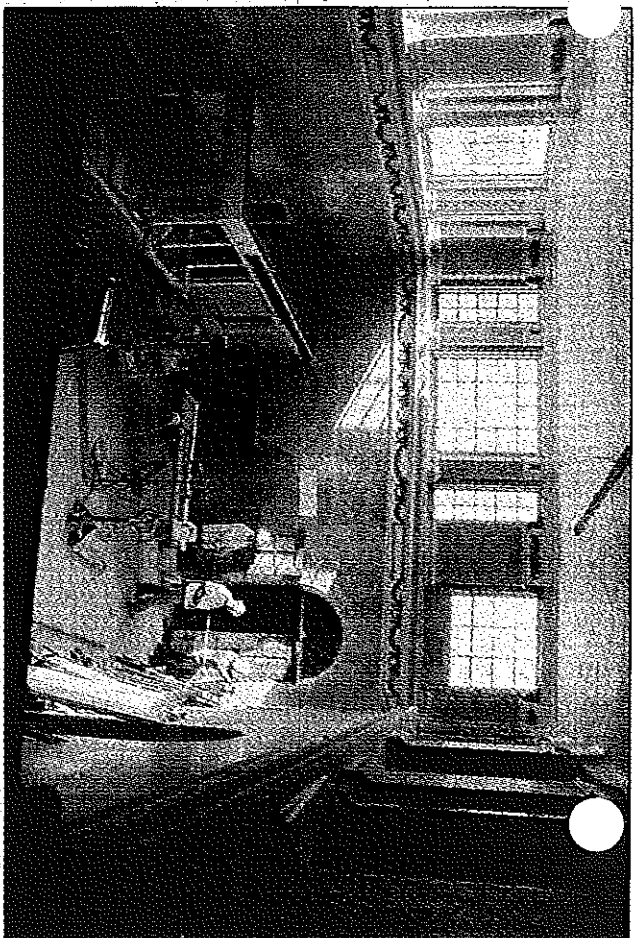
"You've got these pieces and the hotel seemed like the most logical choice," Stein said.

The more than \$5-million renovation project began in December 2007, and the renamed, 30-room Charley Creek Inn is expected to open in August.

Much of the work done thus far has involved stripping the building down to bare walls and floors, which, while nearly 90 years old, have held up remarkably well, Stein said. "That was another reason we moved confidently into it," she said of the project.

Construction crews started at the top of the building and are making their way down floor by floor, hanging drywall, running plumbing and electrical lines and installing fixtures. One suite will be finished by March so individuals can get a sense of what the inn will look and feel like once completed.

When it opens, the Charley Creek Inn will have a prominent and vibrant history.



BARRY ROCHFORD

Crews work in the lobby of the former Red Apple Inn in Wabash, which is being renovated into the 30-room Charley Creek Inn.

CHARLEY CREEK FOUNDATION

The Charley Creek Foundation, named after the creek that runs through the city of Wabash, operates the Dr. James Ford Historic Home and the Charley Creek Gardens.

The Dr. James Ford Historic Home is located at 177 W. Hill St. The restored 19th-century home allows visitors to experience what life was like for the Ford family in the years before and after the Civil War. For more information, visit www.jamesfordmuseum.org.

Located at 551 N. Miami St., the Charley Creek Gardens are open year-round and contain native and foreign plants. An education and research center provides guided tours. For more information, visit www.charleycreekgardens.org.

floor and space for retail businesses. Hoosier Salon, an Indianapolis-based nonprofit organization, will operate an art gallery inside the inn.

"This will be the only northern location in Indiana," Carrie Makin, director of marketing for the Charley Creek Foundation, said of Hoosier Salon.

A board room that can be used for meetings and events will be on the second floor, while a ballroom capable of seating 250 and a catering kitchen will be located in the basement.

One of the inn's unique amenities will be a rooftop garden room that seats 40. The room, which will provide a bird's-eye view of Wabash, can be used year-round and be opened on warm days. It will be surrounded by a green-roof system that features native Indiana plants.

"There's nothing like this in Wabash," Stein

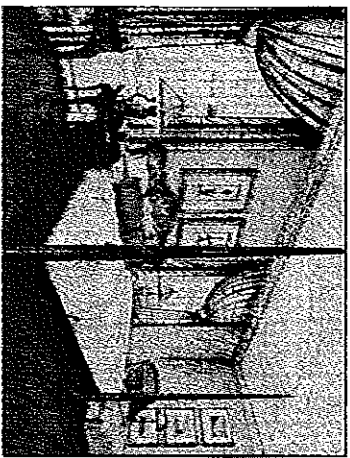
The inn will have mostly one-bedroom suites with some two-bedroom suites, and five rooms on the fourth floor will have full kitchens. Each room will have its own unique design.

"I don't think you'll walk through any room and think, 'Oh, I've seen this room before,'" Stein said.

Wherever possible, the building's history is being preserved. Old doors will be reused and old windows will be stripped and repaired. The original terrazzo floors found in the lobby and ballroom will be restored.

Stein said businesses have expressed an interest in the Charley Creek Inn's ground-floor, storefront space, and she is hopeful that they, too, will offer something unique and draw people to downtown Wabash.

"If we could choose, we would choose



CONTRIBUTED ILLUSTRATION

Each room in the Charley Creek Inn will feature its own design.