

The Philadelphia Inquirer

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2005

Business

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Marine Club units going condo

By Reid Kanaley
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The owner of the former Marine Corps quartermaster's supply depot at South Broad Street and Washington Avenue said yesterday that he would convert the seven-story complex of 300 apartments into condominiums over the next three years.

The proposed conversion of the Marine Club, a Classical Revival structure on the southwestern corner a dozen blocks south of City Hall, signals continued expansion of the city's hot condo market.

Eric Blumenfeld of EB Realty Management Corp., who has owned the Marine Club since 2000, said he expected to spend \$20 million on the conversion. He notified tenants yesterday.

Blumenfeld said tenants would be offered their apartments in as-is condition for prices in the "high 100s." He said he expected renovated units to sell for up to \$400,000.

"Our overall plan is to completely reposition the property" with extensive renovations to common areas and the addition of a 10,000-square-foot health spa with indoor pool, Blumenfeld said.

Current rents in the building average \$1,000 a month, he said. The 1904 building started life as a military warehouse.

Broad and Washington is "clearly part of an expanding edge of Center City," said Paul Levy, president of the Center City District.

In a June report titled "Going Condo Crazy in Philadelphia," Aime L. Baumiller, a market analyst at



Supplemental photo provided by Marine Club

PNC Real Estate Finance, said Center City had about 2,400 condo units under construction and an additional 2,000 in the pipeline.

Nicholas Buss, a commercial real estate economist at PNC in Pittsburgh, said factors driving the market that were not unique to Philadelphia included low mortgage interest rates and the trend in empty nesters' opting for city living.

Since 10-year tax abatements for home buyers became available in 1997, Levy said, 8,200 dwelling units have been added to Center City.

Conversion of the Marine Club is "good for South Broad because it creates another group of long-term homeowners in there," he said.

Blumenfeld's EB Realty is behind the current \$50 million renovation of the old Albert Nipon factory at 640 N. Broad St. into high-end apartments, the just-completed Cigar Factory condos in Northern

Liberties, and the continuing apartment-to-condo conversion of Abbotts Square at Second and South Streets.

"We're trying to play both sides of that game, both in the rental and the condo sales," Blumenfeld said.

Blair Stern, 23, who has been living at the Marine Club while attending Temple University, was notified of the conversion yesterday morning, and said she had already decided to buy her second-floor apartment - if her parents in Northeast Philadelphia will help with the finances.

"I always knew I wanted to be a homeowner," said Stern, a senior who hopes to become a Philadelphia school teacher. "I just love the city, and my apartment has a great view, high ceilings, all the things I really, really like."

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