

New Fondulac Bank in East Peoria's Levee District nearly ready

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EAST PEORIA — Jim Mamer has been working on the planning and construction of a new Fondulac Bank in East Peoria for about half of his, so far, 26-year career with Morton Community Bank.

The building that has occupied his thoughts for more than a decade opens for business in two weeks in East Peoria's Levee District, in a small corner of the former 86-acre Caterpillar Inc. factory brownfield.

"It has been a long deal," said Mamer, the president and co-CEO of Morton Community Bank. "It's hard to believe we're so close to opening."

The banking building is the centerpiece of the new \$16 million, three-story, 54,000-square-foot anchor located on the West Washington Street roundabout at the west end of the district. Its actual address is Clock Tower Drive, named for the enormous and iconic four-sided clock tower that tops the brick and stone building.

The building does not replace the bank's headquarters in Morton, but it does consolidate several aspects of Morton Community Bank's functions - namely, Winter Insurance, credit department, loan review, appraisal, and trust services in one central building. It also brings for the first time an investment representative into East Peoria.

Each floor is 18,000 square feet. The bottom floor is a modern branch of Fondulac Bank, a division of Morton Community Bank, along with office and reception space for several of the umbrella company's other functions. The second floor contains two conference rooms, more office space and the elegant Clocktower Room, a room for power business lunches that sits behind two large wooden doors with an image of the bank's clock tower signature carved into each one.

The second floor also will be the new home of the East Peoria Chamber of Commerce.

"It was Jim Mamer's vision to have the chamber of commerce involved in the project since we are the conduit for business activity in the area," said Rick Swan, the director of the East Peoria chamber.

Chamber employees have been packing up its current location in the Festival Building and will move to the new space Oct. 31 and Nov. 1 and open for business on Monday, Nov. 4.

"The building is beautiful, as classy as you can get," Swan said. "We're honored and pleased to be a part of that."

The third floor, configured and decorated in a completely different manner than the first two floors, will be occupied by a tenant, Heinold Banwart Certified Public Accountants. Heinold Banwart, which has a long-term lease with the bank, designed its own space.

Morton Community Bank now owns and operates 31 banks from Macomb to Fairbury. Its \$2.6 billion in holdings makes it the third largest independent bank in Illinois, Mamer said.

Twelve years ago, the bank was the first entity to move to buy property on the former Caterpillar site when it purchased an option to buy 7 acres on the west end of the parcel. It has since sold 1.5 acres to the north where a new Aldi grocery store is being built. It sold another parcel to the west to a business that Mamer was not yet ready to identify.

"Hopefully there will be news about that in a few weeks," Mamer said.

Workers applied finishing touches this week and the building was filled with the hammer and saw sounds of construction work, not the muted sounds of banking.

"Looks like there's a lot left to be done," Mamer said, standing in the Clock Tower Room amidst dozens of tightly packed chairs all wrapped in plastic. "But we'll be ready."

The bank hosts a ribbon cutting at noon Nov. 7, then opens for business the next morning.

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