

## **Downtown Oshkosh hotel officially under new ownership**

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/16905/downtown-oshkosh-hotel-officially-under-new-ownership/>

Oshkosh's City Center Hotel is under new ownership, and the local partnership holding the keys is reenergizing revitalization plans.

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Foundation and local hoteliers Richard Batley of RB Hospitality in Neenah and John Pfefferle of Pfefferle Companies, Inc. in Appleton announced their new ownership of the hotel, finalized Feb. 14. The partners have officially closed on the sale of the property, purchasing it from Nashco Hospitality Group LLC, which owned it since 2009. They plan to transform the 179-room waterfront property into a full-service, state-of-the-art business hotel, anchoring the city's downtown and serving as an economic catalyst for the entire community.

"This local partnership's vision, diligence and perseverance will result in great benefit to all of Wisconsin's Event City," said Oshkosh Area Community Foundation President and CEO Eileen Connolly-Keesler, who, in 2010, helped rally a local partnership around the hotel revitalization concept. "I'm pleased that the revitalized hotel will serve as one more successful example of how high-impact collaborations are improving our city's economy and quality of life."

The partners remain dedicated to the hotel vision originally proposed last fall: A renovated, state-of-the-art, full-service downtown business hotel with a new restaurant, reopened in early 2013. The hotel will complement the revitalized, attached Oshkosh Convention Center and enhance nearby UW Oshkosh's vibrant academic conference business. It will also bring new downtown jobs and economic energy to Oshkosh retail storefronts, cafes, performance venues and other businesses aligned with the city's ongoing redevelopment efforts.

Based on the level of shared investment in hotel renovations, it is estimated the project can directly create more than 200 new construction jobs. The reinvigoration of hotel business has the potential to create dozens of new hospitality jobs on site.

The new hotel owners said they also remain dedicated to using the revitalized hotel as an additional source of public good. They propose spinning off some revenue annually as UW Oshkosh Foundation scholarships for Oshkosh high school graduates. Another proposal suggests the potential, future establishment of a collaborative, off-campus academic hospitality program inside the hotel.

"This project is a perfect example of [UW Oshkosh's and the UW Oshkosh Foundation's roles as community catalysts](#)," said UW Oshkosh Chancellor Richard Wells. "Not only can our Foundation help directly enhance job growth and conferencing business downtown and on campus, but it can additionally use this project to help generate some revenue to support homegrown high school graduates' pursuit of college degrees and new academic programs. This project is a testament to collaboration, featuring two incredibly entrepreneurial nonprofit foundations, two stellar local hoteliers and city leaders and citizen stakeholders working hard to revitalize their community."

Batley and Pfefferle join the partnership having helped establish two distinguished and successful Fox Valley hotel businesses. Batley is an owner and operating partner in both Neenah's BEST WESTERN PREMIER Bridgewood Resort Hotel and Conference Center and in downtown Appleton's CopperLeaf Boutique Hotel and Spa. Pfefferle is the managing partner in the CopperLeaf.

"We look forward to working with our partners to breathe new life and enhance business at Oshkosh's downtown, waterfront hotel," Batley said. "This revitalization will be of great benefit to the connected Oshkosh Convention Center, nearby UW Oshkosh and the greater community."

Arthur H. Rathjen, president of the UW Oshkosh Foundation, thanked Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce President and CEO John Casper, who helped connect the two foundations with Batley and Pfefferle. Previous hotelier partner WHG Companies, LLC, amicably opted to pursue other business opportunities last fall when a first proposed hotel purchase agreement could not be reached.

"We also thank Nashco Hospitality for their patience and cooperation in helping this second, successful purchase agreement come together," UW Oshkosh Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services Tom Sonnleitner said.

The UW Oshkosh Foundation, a separate nonprofit organization supportive of UW Oshkosh, abandoned its consideration of a brand new hotel construction project attached to the planned campus Alumni Welcome and Conference Center when the concept of the renovated, full-service downtown hotel just a couple of blocks away emerged. While dramatically enhancing the use of the downtown convention center, the renovated hotel will also support guests participating in UW Oshkosh's current and future campus-based academic conferences and events, including those in the future Alumni Welcome and Conference Center (Learn more: <http://www.uwosh.edu/home/campus-growth/welcome-and-conference-center>).

<http://youtu.be/-NiFgpSX0e0>

No state or tuition dollars are involved in the hotel project's financing. The UW Oshkosh Foundation in collaboration with its private sector partners will oversee and manage the investment in this project. That is in keeping with the nonprofit Foundation's mission to support and enhance the academic mission of UW Oshkosh.

"We remain optimistic that a renovated, full-service convention hotel will enhance our community, serve area businesses, support scholarships and internships and complement our plans for the new Alumni Welcome Center -- located two blocks from the downtown property," Rathjen said.

"Additionally, this renovation project will solve our community's need for another attractive, conference-hosting hotel that supports the efforts of the Oshkosh Convention & Visitors Bureau to showcase Wisconsin's Event City," he said. "With quality, established, local partners like Rich Batley and John Pfefferle, we are confident we will, together, deliver a first-class facility. We truly appreciate how much this project means to the residents of Oshkosh, and the University and University Foundation are proud to be a part of an endeavor revitalizing and enhancing our community."

The hotel's new owners are currently regrouping private investors while refining business plans and

renovation timelines. They will again request project financial assistance from the City of Oshkosh in the form of tax-incremental financing (TIF) to support the hotel renovation.

The Oshkosh Common Council agreed to withdraw consideration of the partners' original TIF proposal last fall after unanticipated renovation costs and the inability to reach a mutually-agreed upon purchase price stalled the project. This year, the city plans to continue construction on public river walk along the Fox River from Main Street to Jackson Street, past the hotel property.

“The hope was always that this local partnership’s hotel renovation proposal might reemerge,” Oshkosh City Manager Mark Rohloff said. “We are eager to again work with the partners and bring their exciting proposal back for the consideration and support of the Oshkosh Common Council and the Joint Review Board.”

Last fall, project partners had proposed renaming the hotel the “Athearn Waterfront Hotel – UW Oshkosh” as an homage to the former Hotel Athearn that was nestled in the city’s downtown for decades. While they remain supportive of establishing a tribute to the Athearn within the property, through the incorporation of historical photographs and displays, they are dedicated to keeping all options available on the hotel’s final naming, including potential incorporation of a franchise’s flag.

Learn more:

- [Alumni Welcome and Conference Center](#)
- [UW Oshkosh: Community Catalyst in a Challenging Economy](#)