

UWO Foundation, partners, Habitat team up for hotel empty-out

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/17318/uwo-foundation-partners-habitat-team-up-for-hotel-empty-out/>

The sale and planned revitalization of downtown Oshkosh's City Center Hotel is benefitting yet another important community partner: Habitat for Humanity.

The hotel's new owners -- the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Foundation and regional hoteliers Rich Batley and John Pfefferle -- have teamed up with Habitat for Humanity to empty out the 20-year-old property over the course of the next week. Furniture, TVs and other items from the property's more than 170 rooms will be donated for resale at Habitat's ReStores throughout northeastern Wisconsin, including Oshkosh, Appleton, Green Bay and Door County locations.

Hotel linens will even be donated to the Oshkosh Area Humane Society.

"Everyone within the UW Oshkosh campus community is, daily, doing his or her part to avoid sending waste to the landfill, to recycle -- to lessen our collective impact on the environment," UW Oshkosh Foundation President Arthur Rathjen said. "With our hotel partners' support, we see this donation project as not only another environmentally sustainable thing to do but also a means of helping Habitat's mission of making homeownership more affordable and, ultimately, strengthening our region's communities."

A corps of student Habitat volunteers from UW Oshkosh and UW Oshkosh Titan football players have stepped up to help coordinate and carry out the mammoth donation mission. Plans call for furniture and electronics within the hotel to be gathered in its street-level ballroom and then moved out, loaded on trucks destined for the regional ReStore locations.

The donation work began Feb. 29. Coordinators expect the empty-out and donation project to continue deep into next week.

"When ReStores receive a donation of this size, it gives them an opportunity to share it with ReStores in the region," said John Morelli, manager of Oshkosh's Habitat for Humanity ReStore. "All of the items from the City Center Hotel will be distributed to the ReStores throughout Northeastern Wisconsin. By distributing the items this way there is a greater impact to many communities in providing homes for families."

The hotel's new owners are wasting no time in preparing it for renovation.

The UW Oshkosh Foundation, Batley and Pfefferle finalized and announced their official purchase of the hotel on Feb. 14. They are currently seeking and coordinating renovation contractors to transform it into a state-of-the-art, full-service, downtown, waterfront business hotel with a new restaurant, planned for reopening in early 2013.

The hotel will complement the revitalized, connected Oshkosh Convention Center and enhance UW

Oshkosh's vibrant academic conference business on campus just two blocks away. 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.

No state or tuition dollars will fund the project. The partners will request city of Oshkosh tax-incremental financing support. To increase city residents' return on investment, the partners' plans also call for the revitalized property to, after its reopening, generate annual scholarship revenue for UW Oshkosh-bound students graduating from Oshkosh high schools. Longer term, the partners envision a hotel-based, collaborative, academic hospitality program with partners such as Fox Valley Technical College and UW Stout, already home to a hospitality major.

Rathjen said the hotel decor donation builds on the strong community spirit driving another project key to downtown Oshkosh's revitalization.

"Collaboration and shared community benefit are already hallmarks of this project, and this partnership with Habitat for Humanity only increases its impact," he said.

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