

Demolition of Guild Inn's hotel structure set to begin *Building will be taken down floor by floor in order to protect historic Bickford building*

By DANIELLE MILLEY
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The first step in the revitalization of the Guild Inn property involves a wrecking ball.

Well, the demolition of the six-storey hotel tower might be a little more gentle than that, but the removal of the 100-room structure clears the path for the \$30-million cultural and heritage institute proposed by Centennial College.

College president Ann Buller, Scarborough East Councillor Paul Ainslie and members of the community were on hand Tuesday (April 14) evening to kick off the demolition.

"I can't tell you how excited I am to be here. I wish we were blowing it up, but I was told I can't do that," Buller joked, adding a demolition isn't usually the cause for celebration.

"But we're building on history and tradition while injecting something new into the city."

Work crews will arrive Monday, April 20, to take down the former hotel floor by floor. The hotel and restaurant, which was built in 1965, closed in 2001.

It is connected to the historic Bickford Inn so it must be carefully taken down; the hallway connecting the derelict building from the 1960s to the historically designated inn will be removed by hand to insure there is no demolition damage to the Bickford structure.

Centennial College proposes to develop a cultural and heritage institute along with a boutique hotel, restaurant and conference centre. The community is excited about the project.

"The Guild Inn was always the heart of Guildwood, many newcomers don't recognize it as such, we're hoping with the Centennial College partnership it can be again," said Timo Puhakka, president of the Guildwood Village Community Association.

He's pleased the plan includes a restaurant with a bar where the community can gather.

The park is a popular location for wedding photography and Puhakka said the association gets inquiries all the time from people wanting to have their ceremony on site too.

"It's going to be very nice to say, 'Here's the number to call, you can plan your whole wedding'," he said.

"The nice thing about the Centennial College plan is it addresses the main issues the community has. It restores the Bickford building."

The Bickford building was built in 1914 for Colonel Harold Child Bickford. It has gone through several transitions including serving as a college and a military hospital. In 1932 it was sold to Rosa and Spencer Clark who established an artists' guild on site.

Many plans have been proposed for revitalizing the site to its former glory, but none have gone anywhere until now.

Janet Heise, director with the Guild Renaissance Group, hopes the vision of the Guild of All Arts is once again realized.

"This is a bittersweet day for me. I stayed in the inn. We view the demolition of the inn as the first step in the revitalization of the property," she said.

Sandy Muir, chairperson of the Guild Renaissance Group, said this is the first step in the property's rebirth.

"Everybody knows about the Guild Inn - someone has had a wedding here or dinner or lunch here with family and friends," she said.

Once the new project is complete, new memories can be created at the historic site.

The demolition is expected to take three months to complete.

"The demolition project will be completed in time for our annual The Guild: Alive with Culture Festival, which has this year been extended to a two-day event on Aug. 15 and 16," Ainslie said.

He said it's been a goal of his to see the property revitalized since he was elected in 2006.

"The park is essential to the area...it is a world renowned tourist attraction."