

FINANCE & COMMERCE

Business News

May 31, 2007

A glimpse into the future

by By Jim Martyka Special to Finance and Commerce

The Building Community Exhibition, which opened in the TCF Tower on Wednesday, gives visitors a look at some of the projects that are changing the face of the Twin Cities.

Peter Bruce likes models. He likes the attention to detail, the precision, the beauty, the excitement and the imagination it takes to see models as completed projects. Sharing that excitement, passion and vision is what his Building Community Exhibition is all about. "I want people to see what's going on in their community, what's happening now and what's planned for the future," said Bruce, organizer of the exhibit and owner of Minneapolis-based Pedestrian Studies, which tracks pedestrian activity in major urban areas. "This exhibition is meant to get people energized about their city. For most, it's their first glimpse of the future."

The Building Community Exhibition opened Wednesday in the atrium of the TCF Tower, 121 Eighth St. S., in downtown Minneapolis. In its seventh year, the exhibition features full-scale models and presentations of projects that are already built, in the process of being built or being planned in the metro area.

The exhibit, which runs through next Wednesday, is free and open to the public.

Bruce thinks this year's event is one of his best efforts.

"There's a lot going on," he said. "And we have a lot of people and organizations that are helping out. There are a lot of fantastic displays."

One highlight is a partial model of the planned Minnesota Twins ballpark. The model and accompanying renderings show key features of the stadium, as well as the area surrounding it.

"They'll see how the transit lines will lead to the park and how the community will look once the park is built," said Chuck Ballentine, Hennepin County deputy coordinator for the project. "Plus, fans will get to see details, like how close they'll be to the action and where they will be sheltered from the weather. It's a real opportunity for people to get a notion of all the stuff they've been reading about."

The exhibition also includes renderings and models of the planned University of Minnesota football stadium, new residential projects in the Mill District, downtown housing, developments revolving around local transit and a few hotel projects, including the much anticipated Ivy Hotel & Residence.

The event's opening reception on Wednesday featured a talk by Todd Klingel, president and CEO of the Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce. Peter McLaughlin, Hennepin County commissioner, was also scheduled to speak, but he was unable to attend because of county matters.

In an earlier interview, he said the exhibit shows some of the changes that have occurred in the metro area and what will follow.

"For example, the true history of the LRT [light-rail transit] dates back to a fight to stop the construction of a freeway around Hiawatha in the 1960s," McLaughlin said.

"For a while there was a lot of debate about that corridor. The transit line lifted a cloud of uncertainty that had hung over that area for the past 40 years. We need to continue to be smart about how we develop and examine the impact so we can make sure that we build the community that we want."

Bruce has noticed growing support for the exhibit, which started as a hobby. Some of the sponsors include city government as well as several of the top design, architecture, development and building firms in town.

"I started showing some of these models because I was excited about them, but over the years it has really gotten some inertia behind it," Bruce said. "Last year, we got around 2,000 visitors, and we're expecting more this year. It's become a very exciting event for downtown Minneapolis."