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Condo building to set pace for Waukegan redevelopment

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As John Bergeron prepares for the ground-breaking of Marquette Place, a luxury condo project in Waukegan, he's trying to drive sales – but he's also trying to drive the city's redevelopment efforts.

The condo project is the first among dozens of residential developments planned for the aging city to the north of Chicago. In the coming years, city planners are expecting thousands of residential units, a resurgence of retail growth and new jobs to fill office buildings.

Though many of the plans are far off, Bergeron sees Marquette Place as a project that will exemplify the redevelopment.

"We have to set the pace here," he said from his Libertyville office. "Anyone can build a box, we have to do something that will scream 'we have a market here.'"

Bergeron, owner of the Marquette Enterprise Group, LLC, will open the sales office for the development as early as next week in a rehabilitated downtown Waukegan office building.

At the end of the building's third phase, Marquette Place will be 250 units. They are currently chipping away at the presales that will qualify them to start construction. So far, they've sold 17 units – short of the 34 units they need to sell to move forward on the project. He expects sales to be completed for a July ground-breaking.

Marquette Place is aimed at capturing the young professionals who might be considering a move to Chicago said Bergeron's wife and business partner, Sue. "We've heard from people who are interested and they've said they're excited that they don't have to leave Waukegan for urban living," she said.

Given Waukegan's proximity to Chicago and its suburban area, city officials are quick to point out that Waukegan is a city with its own character.

"We are a city, not a suburb," said Robin Schabes, director of lakefront and downtown redevelopment for the city. "There are plenty of bedroom communities in the area, we are an urban downtown, in addition to residential we have commercial areas."

Marquette Place is the first of the residential projects planned for Waukegan she said. Next will be a master-planned residential complex to be built along a stretch of Lake Michigan along the south portion of the city's lake front. The project, led by Ampsky & Associates, LLC, will include a wide range of housing types including condominiums and single family homes.

The entertainment portion of Waukegan's redevelopment is anchored by the \$23 million renovation of the Genesee Theater in 2004.

Another \$17 million was invested by the city in a new city hall and a parking garage.

Residential and business development will follow a master plan designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill which was adopted by the city council in 2003. At build-out in 20 years, the 1,400 acre lakefront area will hold 3,700 residential units – while leaving half the area for open space.

"Once, we had an industrial-oriented lakefront, now we're gearing that towards residential," she said. "The city decided that it wanted to take advantage of its proximity to the lake and what an unique asset that is."

A view of the lake plays heavily in Bergeron's marketing of Marquette Place – especially when it comes to price.

"Where else are you going to get a two-bedroom unit with a view of the lake for \$322,000?" he said. "Not in the city, not on the North Shore. That's a million-dollar view."



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