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## Portwalk project begins

*Complex will increase jobs in city*



Jeff Johnston, principal of Cathartes Private Investments, watches as the excavator from Kidder Wrecking in Plaistow takes a swipe at the Parade Office Mall sign as demolition of the building officially begins Phase I of the Portwalk project Thursday in Portsmouth. Rich Beauchesne photo

By **Casey Sullivan**

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PORTSMOUTH — City officials and Portwalk developers gathered to witness and celebrate the official beginning of the Parade Office Mall's demolition Thursday afternoon.

A 128-room, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified Marriot Residence Inn will be constructed after the Parade Office Mall is demolished, completing the first of three project phases. Phase 1 is predicted to take about 12 months and is projected to generate approximately \$250,000 in annual tax revenue for Portsmouth, according to Jeff Johnston, a principal at Cathartes Private Investments.

The project is a joint venture between Cathartes Private Investments and Schleicher and Stebbins Hotels.

"We're delighted to be moving full speed ahead on Portwalk, and to continue helping Portsmouth develop its vision for the city's northern tier," said Johnston. "We're proud to bring this high quality hotel downtown, create good jobs for Portsmouth and formally begin Portwalk, a development that has received tremendous community support every step of the way."

Johnston thanked the neighbors of the construction site, who "kept an open mind, worked cooperatively with us throughout the process and helped make this a better project.

"Today we start a new chapter on the history of this site," he said at the ceremony. Johnston said the Parade Office Mall building has been called the ugliest in Portsmouth. He also joked that many say it is the ugliest building in the world.

The ceremony was also attended by City Manager John Bohenko, who said the project "marks yet another benchmark in the evolution of Portsmouth."

"To say that we are pleased to be here today in light of this economy would be an understatement," Johnston said.

"Since last year, there has been bad news in the economy. Major American corporation iconic brands are going bankrupt.

"Jobs are disappearing and people are hurting," said Johnston.

"We are proud of the fact that we are" creating jobs, he said.

The project is expected to create about 200 construction jobs and approximately 75 permanent jobs upon completion.

Portwalk has also been recognized for its environmentally conscious design. In April, the New England chapter of the Congress for New Urbanism awarded Portwalk's lead architect, Elkus Manfredi, its 2009 Urbanism Award.

Chuck Locke, a co-owner of Gove Construction, also spoke at the ceremony.

"John (Bohenko) just asked me if we were busy," Locke began. "No, we haven't been. Now we will be."

Locke said the Portsmouth-based site development company will add to its 25-employee staff as a result of the project.

"We expect to hire back another five employees to work on Portwalk," he said. "These are local tradesmen who are anxious to get back to work.

"It's going to be great for Portsmouth," Locke said.

Ultimately, Portwalk will feature four LEED-certified buildings of mixed use.

In addition to the hotel, the project will create 36 downtown residences, 15-20 retail shops and restaurants, and more than 175,000 square feet of premium downtown office space. The development will also include Portwalk Place, a new private street to connect Deer and Hanover streets — designed to extend the Vaughan Mall walkway and create a walkable connection between downtown and the northern tier.

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