

Jemal plans first exterior renovations for Statler City complex

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The Statler Hotel, designed by George B. Post & Sons, was completed in 1923. It was the second and largest hotel opened in Buffalo by Ellsworth Statler.

Mark Mulville/Buffalo News

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Douglas Jemal, the new owner of the Statler City complex on Niagara Square, is ready to start work on facade repairs and restoration designed to bring the century-old building back to its original appearance.

Plans are being finalized, but Jemal previously said he envisions spending more than \$100 million to convert the 19-story building into a 600-room convention and events hotel, and the banquet operations and retail storefronts on the lower floors.

He also intends to introduce residential apartments and gaming to the mix, hoping to capitalize on the Statler's location on the edge of Niagara Square and across the street from the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center.

For openers, though, he's beginning with the building's long-neglected outside – which former owner Mark Croce had begun to tackle in recent years, before he died in a helicopter crash early this year. Jemal purchased the Statler from Croce's estate in May for \$7.75 million.

“We’re just trying to put Humpty Dumpty back together, starting with the magnificent facade it had, and cleaning debris on the inside,” Jemal said. “I would love to make it what it was – a hotel connected to the convention center with meeting rooms and gaming.”



A historic photo of the Statler Hotel.

Jemal plans to focus initially on the first 30 feet of the facade up from the street, using photos from the early 20th century that his team found of the Delaware Avenue building and other Statler Hotels in other cities. He's working with historical advisers and Buffalo Construction Consultants on the effort.

The goal, said architect Lauren Pacheco of Washington, D.C.-based Antunovich Associates, is to "return the exterior of the Statler from the pedestrian standpoint back to its original look" from 1923.

For the most part, that means "trying to replicate what is missing," but in some cases workers will seek to "restore it not quite to what was there, but something similar," Pacheco explained to the Buffalo Preservation Board, which received the proposal on Thursday, and assigned a design review committee to evaluate it.

Among the tasks, crews will remove the red granite that now clads the ground-story of the building but was not part of the original design. They will also restore the original terra cotta covering, where it exists, as well as other terra cotta ornaments that had worn down over many years, Pacheco said.



DETAIL OF ENTRANCE FRONT



DETAIL OF END BAY



DETAIL OF NIAGARA SQUARE TERRACE

Black-and-white photos of the Statler Hotel in its heyday.

Buffalo Preservation Board

The temporary vestibule on the main entrance on Delaware Avenue will be removed, while the revolving doors will be repaired and restored. Other retail doorways that were relocated at some point in the last 97 years will be moved back to their original locations.

"We're keeping with the same rhythm of storefronts that were there," On the side of the building facing Genesee Street, Jemal wants to reduce the long storefront opening – originally just small windows with grates on them, as along Mohawk Street – to match the design of retail spaces along Delaware. The existing wood windows on Mohawk, with grates in them, will be repaired and repainted. Pacheco said.

Storefronts that are not original to the building will be replaced with new dark bronze-colored aluminum ones that match the historic look. Two of the original canopies on the Delaware and Franklin Street facades will be fixed and restored, while an original canopy on the Genesee side that was removed will be re-created.

"Those are the first steps in redeveloping the Statler," Pacheco said.

The plans are similar to those undertaken by Croce, except that Croce had intended to keep the long ribbon window along Genesee instead of reducing the size, and Jemal is installing copper sweep awnings instead of vinyl canopies over the storefronts "because of the precedent we see in the photos," Pacheco added.

"There are actually locations along the building where you can see where the copper was removed," she said. "That's why we're putting them back."



Douglas Jemal, owner of Seneca One tower, stands outside the Statler City building after a news conference.

