

# The Heldrich Opens Its Doors

Steven J. Dundas



The Heldrich project is expected to bring more than 300 new jobs to New Brunswick.

A new hotel and conference center is introduced to the city it will help revitalize

By João-Pierre S. Ruth

AFTER EIGHT YEARS of planning and two years of construction, the first phase of Heldrich Plaza, a \$120 million, 345,000-square-foot mixed-used facility in downtown New Brunswick, is open for business. Known as The Heldrich, the initial phase consists of a 250-room luxury hotel and 50,000-square-foot conference center.

"The Heldrich will draw thousands of new visitors to our city who will patronize our downtown businesses and restaurants, and enjoy our cultural center and nightlife and will also add well over 300 new jobs to our city," New Brunswick Mayor Jim Cahill said at a March ribbon-cutting ceremony. He added that "The Heldrich is just the first part of the Heldrich Plaza," which he called "one of the most important redevelopment projects in New Jersey today."

Speaking on behalf of the state was Gary Rose, chief of the Office of Economic Growth, who saluted the public agencies involved in the huge project.

Heldrich Plaza, a public-private venture built by the nonprofit New Brunswick Development Corp. (DevCo), will include 7,000 square feet

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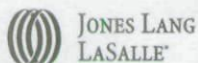
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**From top clockwise: The public taking it all in; Rose offers remarks; Cahill speaking; Heldrich cuts the ceremonial ribbon as DevCo's Paladino and Novak look on.**

of retail space and 48 condominiums ranging in price from the mid-\$400,000 to the mid-\$600,000 range. Meanwhile, the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, a research and policy center that is part of Rutgers University, is moving into the new facility from the nearby Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy.

The hotel's conference capacity includes 25,000 square feet of meeting space, a 7,360-square-foot grand ballroom, a 2,000-square-foot junior ballroom, 21 conference rooms and 11 breakout rooms. The Heldrich is operated by hotel and conference center manager Benchmark Hospitality International in The Woodlands, Texas.

"When this project was first conceived, I said it was going to be the most significant urban de-

velopment project initiated that year," said DevCo President Christopher Paladino. "I just didn't know I was talking about 1998, 1999, 2000..."



**The expansive lobby leads to the 250-room hotel and 50,000-sq.-ft. conference center.**

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The hotel and plaza are named for John J. Heldrich, who has played a key role in the downtown renewal of New Brunswick. "In 1968, John was a young executive at Johnson & Johnson when then-CEO Philip Hofmann directed him to work with local leaders to help revive New Brunswick, says DevCo. Chairman Ira S. Novak. "His efforts and leadership led to the

and community sectors working together can accomplish anything."

Public participants in the project included the New Jersey departments of Community Affairs, Labor and Workforce Development and Economic Development, the Middlesex County Improvement Authority and Rutgers University. Private entities included Keating Building Corp. of Philadelphia and the architecture firm Culpeper, McAuliffe, Meaders Inc. in Atlanta. ♦

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