Dear Jen,

Many exciting events happened in Eau Claire in 2013, and we can expect many more in 2014. The Confluence Project was voted into referendum and will be on the April Ballot. The former Ramada Hotel, Green Tree Inn and Suites, and UWEC Centennial Hall have exciting news to start 2014. With the year just beginning we can look forward to Downtown Eau Claire's schedule of events!

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**Confluence Project question will be placed before voters on April 1 ballot**

By Andrew Dowd
Taken from the Leader-Telegram

Eau Claire city voters will have two questions on the spring election ballot that would impact local government contributions to the Confluence Project's proposed $51.2 million community arts center.

Despite strong words against a referendum impacting how the city can help fund the construction of performing arts buildings, the Eau Claire City Council voted 9-1 Tuesday to put the issue on the April 1 ballot.

"The fact that this is going to referendum is very right and proper," said Councilman Dave Daux, one of the few
Downtown Eau Claire 2014 Schedule of Events

February 26
Annual Awards Dinner

May 17
City Spring Clean Up

August 2
Summer Fest & Family Night in the Park

September 20
International Fall Festival

October 31
Trick or Treating

December 6
Christmastime in the City

council members who spoke strongly in support of the referendum. Several other members said they begrudgingly voted to hold the April 1 referendum, but still strongly oppose it.

"I will do everything I can to fight its passage in April," said Councilman Eric Larsen, a military veteran and retired police officer. "I served to protect us from this kind of bad law."

He contended the referendum wording is confusing and sets bad policy for how the city should decide funding for projects.

Voting no
Councilman David Klinkhammer said he expects to be vilified for casting the lone vote opposing the referendum, but he also said it's poorly worded and bad policy.

"A well thought-out referendum deserves to be on the ballot. This does not," he said.

Councilwoman Catherine Emmanuelle called the referendum efforts "an oppositional scheme to undo a modest pledge to the Confluence Project" that created a "manufactured appearance of a divided community." The council voted 8-3 in October to pledge $5 million toward the project planned for downtown Eau Claire.

Because it seemed like the most effective way to handle the issue, Emmanuelle ultimately agreed to approve the April 1 ballot question, but said she feels it will fail.

"This option, putting it on the ballot, pulls off the Band-Aid the quickest," she said.

Read the full story here.

Former Ramada is Emptied, and Ready for Remodeling
Work is moving fast at the former Ramada Hotel. Just days after the announcement of the purchase on January 15th, rooms were beginning to be emptied of their furnishings. And now, about two weeks later, the entire building is cleared out. "We've got a lot going on. We're doing lots of inspections of the building to get a grasp on the mechanical equipment, the masonry, and are moving aggressively to work with Market and Johnson to completely understand all of our options," said Zach Halmstad, leader of Pablo Properties, the entity that purchased the hotel. Just after the announcement, furnishings were given to local families and local charities. And Halmstad said they're recycling all of the ceiling tiles and carpeting. The remaining contents are being moved to the convention center "so we can get a good inventory," Halmstad said. "People will see Market and Johnson trucks showing up with dumpsters. We hope to keep the distraction to the downtown area at an absolute minimum."

The 123-room hotel, which has been vacant since its closing at the end of November, will be completely remodeled and reopened by the end of the year. Plans include reducing the number of rooms to between 80 and 90, making room for suites and long-term stay rooms. The convention center will be renovated, and there will be a coffee shop and a new restaurant. "We have plans to redesign the entire first floor and house a restaurant that focuses on great, locally-sourced food," Halmstad said.

An Eau Claire North grad, and UW-Eau Claire alum, Hamstad, along with a partner, founded JAMF Software in Eau Claire. Pablo Properties, which is focused on improving Eau Claire's downtown, is behind building a new four-story, 72,000 square foot, environmentally-friendly JAMF office near Phoenix Park. When complete in the fall, the office will be home to about 150 employees. Pablo Properties is also one of five investors
of the Green Tree Inn that will be renovated and turned into a boutique hotel, beginning this spring.

Mike Schatz, Downtown Eau Claire, Inc. Executive Director, and Director of the City's Redevelopment Authority said Halmstad's positive impact on the community is significant.

"The purchase of the former Ramada Hotel by the Zach Halmstad-led Pablo Properties is a big win for downtown. Zach is committed to helping revitalize downtown and has the financial reserves to make the investments the hotel needs," said Schatz.

At a recent meeting of the Redevelopment Authority, which has the purpose of blight elimination and urban renewal, members praised Halmstad's work and determination.

Halmstad is devoted to bringing the hotel back to what he remembers it growing up, as thriving, and getting other areas on track to flourish as well.

"We have a rare opportunity right now to accelerate the redevelopment of the downtown area. RCU started the ball rolling over ten years ago, and the City followed suit with Phoenix Park," Halmstad said.

He said people can see the impact it's had with the restaurants, the apartment buildings, and the new JAMF building.

"If we all work together, we can have an amazing impact that will last generations on the other side of the river. We're doing everything that we can to prove that this is a financial model that works, and that it will continue to spur economic development."

Hotel Owners Thinking How They can Work Together
The team that will soon be transforming the Green Tree Inn and Suites is busy brainstorming. With the purchase details of the Green Tree finalized in November, and the announcement of the purchase of the former Ramada Hotel in January, the two new teams of owners are working together.

"We've discussed sharing certain services such as laundry, maintenance, transportation, etc. We can also save when procuring items for the hotels, as we'll buy supplies in higher numbers, said Zach Halmstad, a member of the partnership called Longform, LLC, the group that purchased the Green Tree.

The core owners are all residents of Eau Claire, and are intent on reopening the hotel late this year or early next year, as a creative and unique boutique hotel.

Halmstad says those currently living in the hotel will be moved out by next month, and work will begin in early spring.

Plans call for 30 modern and creative rooms, as well as activities that focus on music, arts, and recreation.

The partners say this purchase adds to the momentum that's currently taking shape downtown.

The hotels will have very different identities, Halmstad
"These are items that we hope are great attractions for the people of Eau Claire, and not just for travelers who are staying at the hotels."

Mike Schatz, Executive Director of Downtown Eau Claire, Inc. and the City's Redevelopment Authority, said the young team continues the recent private sector movement to take downtown to a higher, next level.

"It's great to see emerging community leaders in the 30-something age group investing in the long-term vision of growing the downtown. These private sector-driven hotel properties, along with the under-construction JAMF office building, and Riverfront Terrace loft apartments will add substantial value to downtown."

Centennial Hall opens its doors at start of spring semester

Centennial Hall is the first new academic building on the UW-Eau Claire campus in more than 30 years.

(Photo credit to UWEC.edu)

Taken from the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire.

EAU CLAIRE - When students returned to the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire for the start of spring semester Jan. 21, they witnessed something not seen on campus in more than three decades. Centennial Hall, UW-Eau Claire's newest academic building, was up and running and fully operational after a nearly two-year period of construction in the central campus mall area. The $44.5 million building, located between Schneider Hall and Zorn Arena, is the first new building to be entirely funded with state tax dollars on the UW-Eau Claire campus since 1982. The approximately 182,000-gross-square-foot building houses the university's College of Education and Human Sciences administrative units; significant new classroom space for use by the entire campus; the departments of education studies, special education, English and languages; and select student support services. The project was conceived in 2001 as a result of an
intensive study led by UW-Eau Claire's facilities planning unit and involving UW System and all UW-Eau Claire departments from academic and student affairs, said Ricardo Gonzales, UW-Eau Claire director of facilities planning.

Read the story [here](#).

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**Vote for your downtown favorites**

At our Annual Awards Banquet February 26, 2014 we will be celebrating all of the amazing things that happened in Downtown Eau Claire in 2013. At this time we will also honor and recognize great businesses and community members. We want to hear from you!

It will only take a minute! Nominate and vote for your favorites in these categories:

- Downtown Development of the Year
- Downtown Renovation of the Year
- Downtown Best New Business
- Downtown's Best Annual Event
- Best Customer Service - Downtown Restaurant
- Best Customer Service - Downtown Retail
- Best Customer Service - Downtown Service Industry

[Vote for your favorites here](#)

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**Post Office will relocate before next October**

The U.S. Postal Service continues to look for potential sites to move to, and even more so, now that Eau Claire's Redevelopment Authority has purchased the building it leases. The RDA bought the 27,000 square-foot building at 126 N. Barstow Street on Nov. 20 from the Gateway Industrial Park Corporation, a non-profit development group, for about $350,000.
Mike Schatz, Executive Director of the RDA, said the RDA will assume the existing lease with the U.S. Postal Service. The lease is up September 30, 2014. Schatz said there are no plans to renew the lease. He said the long-term plans for the 1.5 acre site are to redevelop it; possibly tearing the building down and building a parking structure, with commercial space included.

JAMF Making Progress
JAMF is working hard to get the downtown building finished, the precast structure is complete. Now the focus is on framing and sheathing the exterior walls to enclose the building and be less susceptible to the elements. The extreme cold weather has been hard to work around, but the crew is doing an amazing job despite the weather!

We hope you found this newsletter helpful and informative. For more up-to-date news visit us online: www.EauClaireDevelopment.com

Sincerely,
Every day the City of Eau Claire Economic Development Division offers low-interest loans (60% of the Prime Rate as published by the Wall Street Journal) to businesses expanding or relocating within the Eau Claire Area.

http://www.eauclairedevelopment.com/doing_business/assistance.html