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History honored ahead of The Main hotel's opening in downtown Norfolk

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Local elected and business and economic development leaders formally unveil the historic facade of the Decker Building, which will be incorporated into The Main, a soon-to-open hotel and conference center in downtown Norfolk.



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Norfolk Mayor Kenny Alexander, left, and Bruce Thompson, CEO of Gold Key I PHR, talk before a ceremony to unveil a historic facade at The Main Hotel and Conference center in downtown Norfolk.

In about 60 days, The Main, a new downtown Norfolk hotel and conference center, is slated to formally open its doors to guests.

On Monday, Norfolk Mayor Kenny Alexander, the hotel's developer, Bruce Thompson and members of the business and economic development community gathered to formally unveil the Decker Building facade, a reminder of new building's place in history.

The old facade was removed and stored about a decade ago, ahead of the hotel's construction. It was preserved and incorporated into the new building.

Overall, the hotel and conference center is a \$150 million project that includes a 21-story tower, about 300 guestrooms, multiple restaurants and ballroom accommodations for about 2,000 people.

Built in 1919 for Guaranty Title & Trust Co., which declared bankruptcy in 1929, the historic building is in the 100 block of Granby Street. The structure was later purchased in 1940 for Frederick J. Dean Jr., a prominent Norfolk attorney, according to a city news release. In the early 1980s, husband and wife Peter and Bess Decker purchased the building for the Decker Law practice.

Thompson, CEO of developer Gold Key I PHR Hotels and Resorts, said he believes The Main "is going to be by far not only an iconic property for the city of Norfolk but for the region." He said the hotel and conference center has already booked more than 130 state, national and international conventions representing more than 100,000 room nights. Eighty percent of those events have not previously convened in Norfolk.

The old facade will serve as an entrance for patrons who visit two of The Main's restaurants – Saltine, which is on the ground floor, and Varia, located on the second floor. According to the city, The façade consists of 528 solid gray limestone blocks which are 3 feet by 1 foot and 1 foot deep. Each weighs about 400 pounds, and hand-carved lion heads are featured in the structure's neoclassical and class revival architecture.

"It's with great pleasure and great honor that we bring this facility into the market in the next 60 days," Thompson said. In advance of that, Thompson added, celebrating the historic facade is "a little nod back to the past."

From the podium, Alexander praised the collaborative spirit that preserved the historic structure.

"Bruce Thompson did not have to incorporate this facade into The Main," Alexander said. "He was not obligated, but he did. Bruce, we thank you, the city thanks you for on a handshake for agreeing to incorporate the facade of the Decker Building into this spectacular facility called The Main."

Members of city council and city staff joined business leaders and economic development advocates from the past and present under drizzly gray skies that cleared by the time the ceremony concluded.

Thompson confirmed again after the ceremony that The Main plans to host an arts extravaganza to celebrate the property's opening. Thompson said he expects to announce details regarding that event very soon.