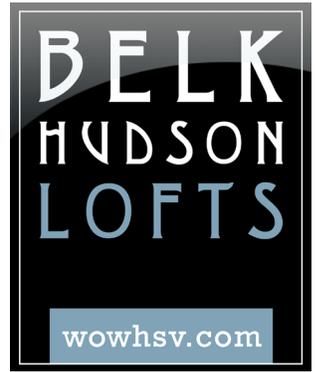


# Belk Hudson Lofts moving from drawing board to reality in downtown Huntsville

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By Steve Doyle, The Huntsville Times The Huntsville Times



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HUNTSVILLE, Alabama -- The vacant Belk Hudson building in downtown Huntsville is about to roar back to life.

Developer Charlie Sealy III and his wife, Sasha, held a groundbreaking ceremony Monday to signal the start of work on their \$11.5 million Belk Hudson Lofts project at the corner of Washington Street and Holmes Avenue.

Charlie Sealy said he hopes the additional foot traffic from 75 apartments helps convince more retailers and restaurants to take a chance on downtown.

"We're just looking forward to other developments coming," said Sealy, who lives a few blocks away on Eustis Street. "We hope it will be like a snowball rolling downhill."

David Wilson, downtown marketing director for the nonprofit Big Spring Partners downtown revitalization group, said the new apartments will be a perfect "middle market" between the center city's \$300,000-plus condos and government-subsidized units for the elderly.

"There's a tremendous pent-up demand, I believe, for apartments" downtown, Wilson said Monday.

Belk Hudson Lofts will feature 75 one- and two-bedroom apartments renting for between \$850 and \$1,500 a month. Tenants will have access to private underground parking, a fitness room with yoga/Pilates studio and rooftop terrace.

Construction is expected to be finished next July.

Belk Hudson Lofts developers Charlie Sealy III, third from left, and his wife, Sasha, join Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle and others in a Monday groundbreaking ceremony. (The Huntsville Times/Michael Mercier)

The City of Huntsville is paying the Sealys \$450,000 over five years to leave the building's Depression-era brick exterior walls standing -- a guarantee known as a facade easement.

However, the interior of the former department store will be completely gutted. The six-story apartment project that rises from the rubble will also cover the former Olde Towne

Brewing site on Holmes Avenue and an adjacent office property on Washington Street. Mayor Tommy Battle said the apartments could be the “sparkplug” that puts downtown revitalization on a faster track.

“It all starts with people living downtown,” he said.

Sealy, 32, is a vice president with Sealy Management. Founded by his grandfather, the Tuscaloosa-based business owns and manages about 8,000 apartment units across the Southeast, including 2,329 units in the Huntsville area.

Belk Hudson Lofts will be owned by Charlie and Sasha Sealy and operated by Sealy Management.

Charlie Sealy said he expects the apartments, directly across from Humphrey’s Bar & Grill and the new James Steakhouse, to attract a mix of young professionals, empty nesters and others who have been awaiting the arrival of more affordable downtown housing.

About 10 people have already asked to be put on the waiting list for an apartment. Golden & Associates Construction of Birmingham is the general contractor.

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