

RiverHeath opens on the Fox River

By Alex Ronallo, FOX 11 News

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APPLETON – A riverfront development on the site of an old paper mill is now officially open in Appleton. RiverHeath had its grand opening Wednesday.

The project, on the site of an old paper mill, took about seven years of clean up to become a reality.

It is on Banta Court along the Fox River.

Mayor Tim Hanna told FOX 11 RiverHeath's grand opening shows how far the city has come in embracing the river.

"It's the next generation of the Fox River in Appleton," he said.

The \$7-million project started in 2007. It is a mix of apartments, town homes and commercial space. There is also a river front boardwalk.

Developer Mark Geall told FOX 11 it's exciting to see his vision become reality.

"It's rare to find this big a chunk of land right in the middle of downtown, on the water. So we're really fortunate. It's kind of the urban developer's dream," said Geall.

But the dream started as a bit of a nightmare. For about 150 years this site was used for different industrial purposes.

"So there was various types of contamination from the various industrial uses," explained Jennifer Borski with the Wisconsin DNR.

The most recent use was a paper mill.

"That shut down about 15 years ago and we spent a lot of time re-developing it, cleaning up the soil, getting it ready for development," explained Geall.

The DNR told us it took many years and many people to make this area livable and environmentally friendly again.

"The people that caused the contamination, the people that owned the property, local agencies, health departments, the city," listed Borski.

Aside from major cleanup, the project hit roadblocks in 2008.

“With the recession and the change in the banking laws, it changed his whole financial picture, in terms of how to finance this, but he plowed ahead,” Hanna explained.

A \$1.6-million loan from the city helped.

Hanna told us now that RiverHeath is here, it’s all been worth it.

“It’s not just one building, it’s an entire neighborhood that will eventually be down here. It’s people living, businesses, it’s retail. It’s gonna be, really, a gem,” the mayor said.

The developer plans to build another apartment complex, a riverfront trail, and an outdoor music venue. That phase should be complete next spring and cost around 7-million dollars.

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a nice addition to Appleton.

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