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Todd Drive Project Starts

The First Phase Of Arbor Gate Is Expected To Be Finished In About A Year.

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Construction has begun on Arbor Gate, a \$55 million office and retail project south of the Beltline and east of Todd Drive that will replace a strip of aging retail buildings that have been torn down.

"This is a really special project for us," said Sean Baxter of Westwind Associates, which owns the adjacent Kayser Ford and Mitsubishi Motors, 2303 W. Beltline. "This is our neighborhood and this is not just a business venture."

The developers kicked off construction Wednesday at a groundbreaking event that included crane rides so people could envision the views from the upper floors of the buildings.

The 215,000-square-foot project includes two six-story office and retail towers on six acres. Baxter said construction of the towers will be completed in about a year. Another phase is planned later on another part of the property.

The ground floor will have shops and restaurants, and there will be office space above. The upper floors will have views of the UW Arboretum, the UW-Madison campus and the Isthmus.

The concept of Arbor Gate was conceived over a cup of coffee about 4 1/2 years ago.

That meeting at Kayser Ford brought together Loren Mortenson, of Mortenson Investment Group, and Pat Baxter, owner of Kayser Ford. The Baxters, including son Sean, and the Mortensons, including son-in-law Brad Hutter, decided to team up to redevelop the area along the Beltline.

The first effort, a \$22 million project called Landmark Gate planned west of Todd Drive, was scuttled after the developers couldn't win the cooperation of existing property owners.

But they regrouped and decided to build a bigger project east of Todd Drive.

"They gave confidence to everybody that it was going to happen," said Ald. Tim Bruer, who represents Madison's South Side and helped arrange the initial coffee meeting. He said the project won city approvals quickly.

Mayor Dave Cieslewicz praised the Arbor Gate project. "This development is a tremendous asset," he said.

"It will bring jobs, vitality and is just the start of what we're going to be able to do (in the area)."