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An \$18 million Aloft hotel is set to be built in Deep Deuce next year as part of the ongoing Maywood Park development. The hotel will feature modern design with restaurants and retail on the first floor and views of Bricktown and the downtown skyline.

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DEVELOPER HAS LOFTY PLANS FOR NEW HOTEL IN DEEP DEUCE

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An Oklahoma City hotel developer with a penchant for giving franchisers "fits" with his insistence on custom design is planning an \$18 million Aloft hotel for the Maywood Park development in Deep Deuce.

Plans call for construction to start in March at the corner of Walnut Avenue and NE 2 — a corner currently home to the Finley Building, the city's detox center and an abandoned surface parking lot.

Jim Thompson, owner of New Century Investments, has built four hotels in past decade, two with restaurants. His proposal for Maywood Park includes a seven-story, 30-room hotel with three restaurants and 12,000 square feet for boutique retail on the first floor.

"This area is a gateway into Bricktown," Thompson said. "This is a mixed-use development that will be great for Maywood Park with its restaurants and retail, and it will add a lot of life to the area."

The deal involves a complex series of real estate transactions that Maywood Park developer Pat Garrett notes goes back a decade. Part of the hotel property involves the Finley Building, for which the Maywood Park development group originally secured a 99-year ground lease but recently turned

into a sale contract.

The group also has been in talks with city officials to include the detox site, which is set to be vacated later this year once a new location is completed west of downtown. The remainder of the site involves land controlled by the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority, which approved the project on Wednesday.

Thompson is one of a handful of local developers still building hotels after the 2008 economic downturn, with his latest — a Hilton Garden Inn at May Avenue and Northwest Expressway — set to open in August.

Thompson, who has a master's degree in architecture from Oklahoma State University, said Wednesday he prefers to design his own concepts, and also builds, owns and operates each hotel.

Such an approach, he said, isn't always popular with hotel chains that like to have the same look and feel in every city.

Brent LeBlanc, vice president of development for Starwood Hotels and Resorts, helped create the Aloft brand, which he said is designed as an urban venue that targets young professionals.

"The basic premise is an urban lifestyle experience," LeBlanc said.

"This is a vision of the contemporary-designed) WHotels, and it has different furniture, different sights and sounds when you walk in the door."



Jim Thompson, owner of New Century Investments; Gabby Trad, director of operations at New Century; Maywood Park developer Pat Garrett; Starwood Hotels Vice President Brent LeBlanc, and Maywood Park developer Ron Bradshaw celebrate the announcement of an \$18 million Aloft hotel at its future home at NE 2 and Walnut Avenue.

PHOTO BY STEVE LACKMEYER, THE OKLAHOMAN

AT A GLANCE

NEW CENTURY PROPERTIES:

- > Hilton Garden Inn, Northwest Expressway and May Avenue (set to open in August).
- > 809 Sports Grill, Northwest Expressway and May Avenue (set to open in August).
- > Avanti Bar & Grill, Memorial Road and May Avenue (opened 2009).
- > Courtyard Marriott Hotel, Memorial Road and May Avenue (opened 2008).
- > La Quinta Inn and Suites Quail Springs, Memorial Road and May Avenue (opened 2004).
- > Holiday Inn Express, Northwest Expressway and May Avenue (opened 1999).

LeBlanc said the Deep Deuce location, and Thompson and his preference for custom design, are ideal for an Aloft hotel. "When Jim says he gives franchisers fits, it's true," LeBlanc said. "But at Star-

wood, we want to think outside the box. We don't want a cookie-cutter approach. Jim builds the nicest properties, and the amount of creativity and design he puts into these hotels is second to none."