



WARD PERRIN/VANCOUVER SUN and CITY OF VICTORIA ARCHIVES

Dental office to open at site of Sunrise Hotel

Notorious East Hastings hotel cleaned up for new life

By JOHN MACKIE

The Sunrise Hotel used to be a place where people got their teeth punched out. Now it's where the needy will go to get their teeth fixed up.

A dental office will open in about a month on the main floor of the once-notorious Downtown Eastside hotel at 101 East Hastings, which has been cleaned up since it was purchased two years ago by several government agencies and turned over to the non-profit Portland Hotel Society.

The hotel's 54 rooms have been spruced up, the exterior has been restored to its original look and

the main floor has been converted from a dingy beer parlour to the dentist's office, the new home of Co-op radio and even a small cafe.

There will be three chairs in the dentist's office, which will be staffed by one professional dentist and two dental students from the University of B.C. It will handle up to 20 patients per day.

The idea came about several years ago, when some Downtown Eastsiders went through training to try to get jobs in the service industry. Those with poor dental hygiene found the going rough.

See **THE PROVINCE** B5

Province to pay annual costs of nearly \$400,000 for clinic

From B1

"A smile is worth a thousand bucks," said Jenny Kwan, provincial minister of community development, cooperatives and volunteers.

"Especially for [Downtown Eastside] residents who want to enter the hospitality industry and the tourism trade. Teeth are one of the most important things for residents down here, from an employability perspective as well as the health perspective."

"You can have all the skills you want, but if you're not lookin' good, you're not going to get hired," reasoned Brody Williams, a longtime Downtown Eastside resident who hopes to get \$2,000 worth of work done on his teeth.

The annual cost of running the dental clinic, close to \$400,000, will be paid by the provincial government. People on social assistance will receive free dental care.

It's fitting that the dental clinic went into the Sunrise, because in the 1910s it was the home to one of Vancouver's most famous dentists, Painless Parker.

Painless Parker was both a person and a chain of dental offices up and down the west coast. He

had several Vancouver locations on Hastings and Granville street, but the first one seems to have been on the second floor of the Sunrise, which was then called the Irving Hotel.

Painless was quite a showman. He liked to wear the teeth he had extracted during the day on a necklace he strung around his neck.

One day a week, he would go out on the sidewalk with a little platform and invite passers-by to get some free dental work. This would inevitably bring a big crowd. His second-storey offices also had a big window, which allowed the masses a front-row view of his painless methods. His motto was, "If it hurts, don't pay me."

The rebirth of the Sunrise from hellhole to heritage landmark began when B.C. Housing, the Vancouver-Richmond Health Board, the City of Vancouver and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation bought the building for \$1.7 million.

About \$1 million has been spent refurbishing the building, but B.C. Housing's Jim O'Dea said the total cost was only about 50 per cent of the cost of building a new structure. Part of the cost was recouped by selling the Sunrise's old liquor

licence for about \$100,000.

The change in the building has transformed the corner it sits on. Two years ago, it was one of the grungiest spots in the Downtown Eastside. Now the main floor is filled with huge windows, which bring brightness and life to the streetscape.

The Irving Hotel was built in 1906-1907 by Judge Arthur Wesley Vowell. Heritage consultant Don Luxton said it was a high-end hotel in the heart of the city's prime business and commercial district. Each room was equipped with a private bath, hot and cold running water and a telephone — a pretty big deal in 1907.

Its fortunes declined with the neighbourhood after the Second World War.

"It was part of the long, slow deterioration of the Downtown Eastside," Luxton said.

"On Hastings Street in general, once the street cars stopped [in the 1950s], slowly but surely the business district moved elsewhere, the commercial moved elsewhere and the retail moved elsewhere, leaving the hotels as [low-end] residential hotels."

jmackie@pacpress.southam.ca

605-2126