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From the Memphis Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/memphis/news/2018/03/19/see-inside-downtown-universal-life-development.html>

## See inside: Downtown Universal Life development prepares for tenants

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The redevelopment of the historic Universal Life building has been a slog.

Jimmie Tucker and Juan Self of Self Tucker Architects bought the building in 2006 and have been working on its redevelopment ever since. They say, though, that they have no regrets.

"It was really just a matter of sticking with it," Self said.

Their perseverance has appeared to pay off, as the development's anchor tenant will be in the building in less than three months.

***To see renderings, as well as what the building looks like right now, click the slideshow below.***

The development's primary anchor will be the City of Memphis' Business Development Center, which is currently located at 555 Beale Street. The center and its partner organizations are set to occupy about 11,000 square feet of the building's roughly 25,000 square feet.

"We're really appreciative of the historical context of locating in this building," Joann Massey, director of Memphis' Office of Business Diversity & Compliance, said in February. "[Universal Life co-founder] J.E. Walker and the contributions he made to help African-American business owners grow in this community — it's a legacy that we want to pick up the torch and continue."

Tucker said he's glad he wasn't able to land an anchor tenant prior to the City of Memphis, as the fit makes perfect sense for his goal to honor the Walker family's legacy of black entrepreneurship.

One of the building's rooms is being converted into exhibit space where people will be able to learn about the history of the building and Universal Life. A video with interviews of people who worked for the company will play in the room.

About 7,000 square feet in the building remains available for lease. Much of this is located in tighter office spaces that Tucker thinks will be perfect for small firms that want to work with the city's business development center.

"We want to attract tenants to be a part of this community surrounding entrepreneurship, community revitalization and sustainability," Tucker said.

About 2,000 square feet of the space available for rent is an open space on the building's lower level. Tucker said he hopes it is filled with a restaurant — similar to The Office at Uptown — that serves the community along with the building's 150 to 200 occupants.

Tucker expects the relocation of his architecture firm and the city office over the next three months to help him lease the rest of the building; he thinks it will be fully occupied by the end of 2018.

Draws to the building include its fitness center and rooftop patio, which will be able to host about 50 people at a time for events. It will include greenery and solar panels, which will help the developers meet the requirements for a major federal grant secured in 2015. The project also landed an energy conservation bond from the City of Memphis.

After the building is occupied, Tucker and Self are planning to develop a small apartment complex in the lot behind the building. Tucker said he hopes more nearby residents will bring a 24-hour vibrancy to the surrounding area.

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