

# FINANCE AND COMMERCE

## Construction

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### Doran breaks ground on Dinkydome renovation

by [Brian Johnson](#) Staff Writer

Kelly Doran would like to do this groundbreaking thing more often.

There was a celebratory tone all around Wednesday as the principal of Doran Development held a groundbreaking ceremony for the \$36 million Dinkydome restoration and Sydney Hall student housing project at the University of Minnesota — a project Doran has pursued for two years.

And yet, after the perfunctory platitudes and thanking people for their support of the project, Doran struck a somber tone when talking about the need for more such projects in the struggling commercial construction business.

Commercial development is still mired in a “serious economic depression,” Doran told a wet gathering at the construction site. He called on business, labor, public sector and banking interests to “work together to start building privately financed projects” like the restored Dinkydome.

“We are fearful when we hear of 10 percent unemployment and whether or not this recession is really ending. However, I will tell you one thing: in the commercial real estate business, it is not a recession — it’s a depression,” Doran said.

Noting that unemployment in the construction trades is 25 percent or higher, depending on the trade, Doran said the country is “in danger of losing a whole generation of trades people” to other careers.

“Across our country, we are losing tens of thousands of architects, civil, structural and electrical engineers every day. Large and small general contractors and subcontractors are going out of business,” Doran added.

“So I ask the question, who will be there when the economy recovers to build and rebuild our country? ... The banks must start lending and think of real estate the way we used to do it — that every property is unique and different and not ... just a commodity like beans and corn.”

The Doran project will bring 15,000 square feet of renovated commercial space to the 90-year old Dinkydome at the corner of 15th Avenue and Fourth Street on the university’s East Bank, along with 125 units of student housing and 135 underground parking spaces in the new Sydney Hall apartment tower.

Doran expects the project to create 500 construction jobs, which is welcome news to Mike Hawthorne, business manager for the Minneapolis Building and Construction Trades Council.

“For some, this means economic development,” Hawthorne said. “For others, it means increased student housing. These are very important issues. But for the men and women in the construction industry, it means jobs.”

Mayor R.T. Rybak called it an “enormously important project” that will help Dinkytown realize its full potential.

“This project at a very, very difficult period of time stands up and says, ‘We believe in Minneapolis and the university, we believe in ourselves, and we believe we are going to move forward,’” Rybak said.

Occupancy for Sydney Hall is expected in August 2010. Confirmed tenants for the commercial space in the renovated Dinkydome include Ebert’s & Gerbert’s Subs and Wells Fargo.

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