

Over and under

City projects include not only high-rises, but also an underground corridor

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Most new downtown projects have reached for the sky in recent years.

But there's also activity underneath the street.

Since the end of last year, a portion of Davis Street between Judson and Hinman avenues has been closed to westbound traffic. Crews have been working to create a pedestrian corridor about 35 feet below street level that will link the new Mather LifeWays senior living buildings.

The roughly 100-foot-long corridor will connect Mather North (currently under construction on the north side of Davis at Hinman) with the new Mather South, now known as the Georgian, to be built on the south side of the street.

Current plans call for Mather North to open by the end of 2009, and Mather South by the end of 2011.

Once connected, staff, residents and others will be able to use the corridor, which will be heated and lit, to travel between the two structures and share in such amenities as a 10,000-

square-foot fitness center, a day spa, and seven restaurants.

Connects to elevators

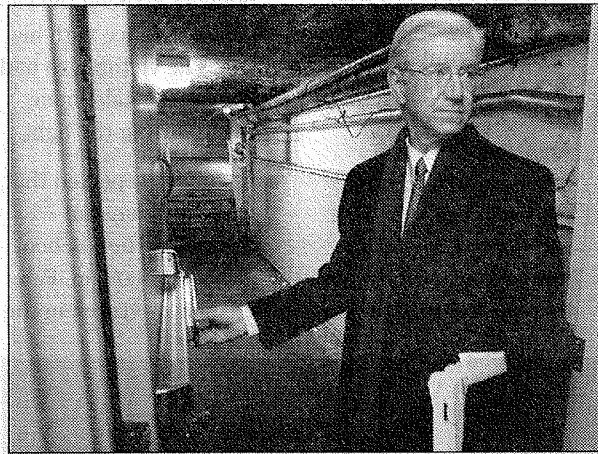
The corridor connects to elevators in each building that residents can use to access lower-level parking and the main lobby areas.

Michael Carney, director of construction for Mather LifeWays, said a small portion of the work will have to be done in 2011 to connect the buildings, but the bulk has been done now to avoid additional street closures.

City officials tacked on a fee for Mather LifeWays to pay as compensation for the corridor in approving the project several years ago.

Officials weren't likely to approve an overpass — such as the one over Central Street that connects Evanston Hospital to its medical office building — because of its effect on the street's appearance.

The biggest challenge of the underground project? Coordinating the work with all the utilities currently located underneath the



JOEL LERNER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Hotel Orrington general manager Russ Abell makes his way through the tunnel that leads to the parking area for the hotel. The hotel's tunnel is believed to date back to 1920.

street, Carney said.

The corridor is located about 4 feet below a massive, 48-inch combined storm sewer system that runs below that portion of Davis.

Storm sewer relocated

Crews had to reroute the sewer temporarily to build the corridor and then create a cavity to fit the two together again, Carney said.

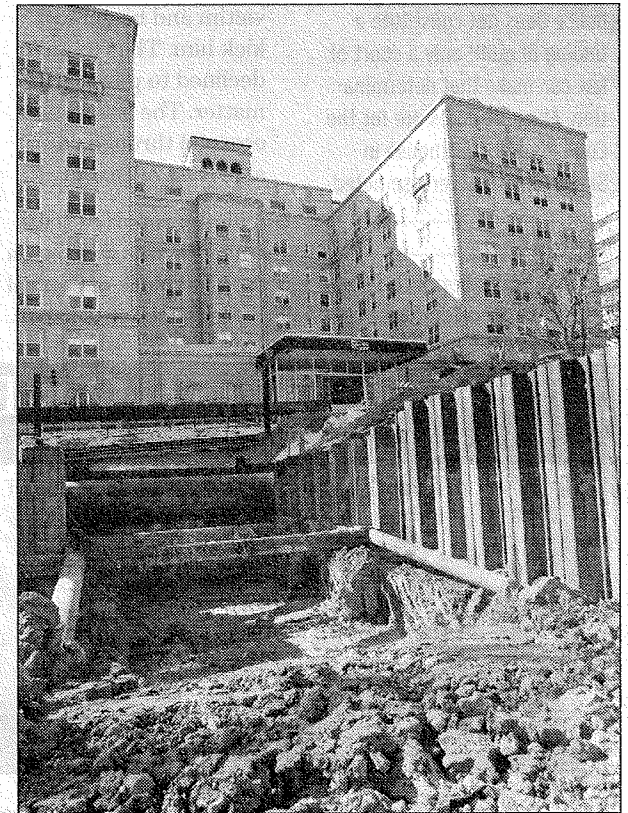
Other utilities in the crowded space above the corridor include telephone, gas, water and electric, he said.

The Mather LifeWays corridor isn't the first of its kind downtown.

A tunnel, believed to have been built in the 1920s, zigzags from just off the main lobby area at the Hotel Orrington, underneath the alley between the hotel, at 1710 Orrington Ave., and Sherman Avenue. At one time, the tunnel led to a pool.

Russ Abell, the hotel's general manager, said the pool has been closed since roughly 1980 after it began leaking.

Too costly to repair, the pool is now boarded over



ALLISON WILLIAMS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Construction crews dug a huge hole to build an underground tunnel that eventually will link two Mather LifeWays senior living facilities at Davis Street and Hinman Avenue.

and the area used for storage. The tunnel is still used, though, by valets on busy Sunday mornings when dealing with mass check-outs. Instead of having to run outside the hotel and then across a couple blocks to retrieve guests' cars

parked in the hotel garage, valets use the tunnel.

Otherwise, "if you're checking out 150 cars on a Sunday morning," Abell said, "and everybody is checking out between 10:30 (a.m.) and 12:30 p.m., that's a lot of running."