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REAL ESTATE

Mexican developer eyes city block near Brickell

by **Oscar Pedro Musibay**

The Mexican developer planning a condominium on the site of the historic Everglades Hotel in downtown Miami has a contract to buy an entire block just west of Brickell Avenue for about \$30 million, sources say.

The block under contract is about 2.75 acres, or nearly 120,000 square feet, and is bounded by Southwest 14th Street on the north and 14th Terrace on the south, Southwest First

Avenue on the west and South Miami Avenue on the east.

Investor Martin Taplin owns about two-thirds of the block. The remaining area is in the hands of Mike Pennekamp, an attorney at Fowler White Burnett, and his siblings. They inherited the land from patriarch Tom Pennekamp, former president and principal stockholder of Pennekamp Insurance Agency, who died in April.

Taplin confirmed there was a contract on the property, but he would not provide any details about the pending deal. Taplin bought the largest parcel, which belonged to Southeast Bank, at an FDIC auction during the late '90s. He accumulated other lots from individual sellers since then.

Taplin is the owner of the Sagamore Hotel at 1671 Collins Ave., which is undergoing a multimillion-dollar renovation, and is a principal in Harbor Realty, which buys apartment buildings for rehabilitation. Harbor owns Courtyards of Kendall and Broadwater Apartments in Kendall.

The Pennekamp portion of the block was home to the offices of Pennekamp Insurance.

Mike Fay, of Abood Wood-Fay, confirmed that he and Larry Stockton of his company were representing the sellers, but he declined to provide any more information about the deal.

"We have the listing," Fay said. "A deal is eminent, but I can't discuss the terms or the buyer."

Mike Pennekamp would neither confirm nor deny that a contract was in hand.

Cabi Developers principal Jacobo Cababie did not return calls for comment.

Cabi is the U.S. subsidiary of GICSA, one of Mexico's largest development companies. Under the direction of chief executive Jacobo Cababie, one of three brothers who serve as principals of the Mexico City-based corporation, Cabi has quickly emerged as a sizable player in South Florida, aligning itself with local developers, including Turnberry Associates.

The 3-year-old Aventura-based division is responsible for Parc at Turnberry Isle and Country Club Center in Aventura, in addition to Turnberry Village and Turnberry Ocean Colony in Sunny Isles Beach, which are being developed in a joint venture with Turnberry Associates. Currently, Cabi is developing the 851-unit Everglades on the Bay condo in downtown Miami.

Cabi plans a mixed-use project at the South Miami Avenue site with retail on the ground floor and residential on top, said one source who asked not to be identified. The company also is considering an office component.

William Holly, president of Holly Real Estate, said South Miami Avenue is going to increasingly become a focus for developers looking for new investment opportunities.



Jacobo Cababie is the principal at Cabi Developers, which sources say is buying a city block near Brickell.

The avenue parallels Brickell block to the west starting Southwest 8th Street and extends south until it changes names to South Bayshore Drive in Coconut Grove.

"Today, in order to do something on Brickell, you have to tear something down," said Holly, who is handling leasing at Espirito Santo Plaza on Brickell Avenue. "The next block is South Miami."

Holly, who in the '90s he researched the property for the Codina Group, said the block is zoned for high-density, multistory development. He said the property is ideally located near the mixed-use Miami Brickell Village project and is easily accessed.

Robert Given, a vice president of the South Florida multihousing group at CB Richard Ellis, said a mixed-use development on the site would fit in with the city government's plan for an area that would make Miami a 24-hour city. Brickell is more fully developed than other areas in the central business district and therefore more attractive to new residents and businesses.

"It's one of the few places in downtown where you can walk out your building and walk to a grocery store, walk to a restaurant as opposed to getting in your car and driving somewhere," Given said. ♦