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Mike Whalen has a panoramic view of Sylvan Slough from his Heart of America corporate office conference room in Moline.

## Whalen's future project will have wonderful view

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Mike Whalen's love affair with the river does not end with his Heart of America Group headquarters in downtown Moline.

The founder of the Midwest restaurant and hospitality chain now has plans for a new mixed-use building upriver in Moline. Known as the e3 Building, the \$15 million to \$17 million project will complement the Western Illinois University-Quad-Cities Riverfront Campus, which is now under construction.

First announced in April — a day after Western Illinois broke ground on the new campus — the e3 Building could still be a few years off from its ground-breaking, Whalen said.

With the economy on the upturn and hopefully a better year ahead, he said potential tenants are beginning to start thinking about upgrading their office space. Up until now, companies have been shying away



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**Whalen talks about a project that his Heart of America Group will develop in Moline's Mississippi River Technology Corridor near the new Western Illinois University campus.**

from upgrading or expanding because the idea was neither economical nor politically correct against the bad economy, he said.

"I think it will be an easy sell five years from now, but right now people might think (the

location) is off the beaten path," he said. As Western takes shape, he predicts the whole Mississippi River Technology Corridor will draw more attention.

Preliminary plans call for e3 to be a five-story building, but the final plans could end up as four

or six. The plan is to situate the building so that both lengths of the building have river views. He envisions a ground floor of commercial tenants that would cater to the nearby student population and the remainder as Class A office space.

Early on in the planning, discussions centered around mixing student housing and office space, but Whalen said those two uses might not make the best neighbors.

While Heart of America has not yet signed an anchor tenant for the new development, he said discussions with potential tenants are picking up. "A project like this ... we're in to 2012 before the best case that this becomes a reality. That's the kind of timetable this type of project requires."

Although he is very comfortable in his current riverfront office, if somebody wants to buy it, he and Heart of America would move into e3.