

10 TO WATCH:

Burgum's work leaves lasting impressions on Fargo

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Doug Burgum is changing the look of downtown Fargo by remodeling some existing buildings and developing new ones. He is now considering plans for the U.S. Bank plaza seen behind him. Dave Wallis / The Forum

Editor's note: Through the end of the year, The Forum will feature a person we have deemed part of an elite "10 to Watch in 2010."

These are local people who, for a variety of reasons, are poised to be newsmakers in the coming year. Readers submitted their nominations, and Forum editors narrowed the list down to 10.

Doug Burgum didn't grow up in Fargo, but his mother, the late Katherine Burgum, did.

And the stories she would tell about the buildings she passed each day walking to school gave her son an indelible appreciation for the city's history.

"I have sort of a direct emotional connection to what downtown could mean to someone years ago," said Burgum, an entrepreneur whose work has left its own lasting impressions on the city.

From the software company he helped found that later became part of Microsoft, to his ongoing role in helping rescue and revitalize historic downtown Fargo buildings, Burgum seems always focused on the future.

Asked what may be in store in 2010, Burgum said he is involved with others, including Xcel Energy, in working to bury underground the power lines and other hardware that clogs alleyways in downtown Fargo.

“It’s not just the aesthetic thing. It also opens up the alleys to be more pedestrian friendly and sort of doubles the amount of retail frontage space,” said Burgum, who also has designs on the U.S. Bank plaza in Fargo.

“We have an option to buy the Broadway-facing half of the block. That includes the current plaza and what was surface parking,” he said.

Burgum’s vision for the property includes a multistory parking ramp that would restore a skyway system that was severed when a parking ramp was demolished.

He also pictures more retail going up on Broadway, with commercial and residential space on the floors above.

“And you’d have an attractive plaza there,” added Burgum, whose Kilbourne Group development company (the name recalls his mother’s maiden name) will likely play a role in the changes, as it has with other projects, including the former Northern School Supply building, now part of the downtown campus of North Dakota State University.

Burgum, who has been encouraged by a number of people to apply for the job of NDSU president and says he hasn’t ruled it out, cited several reasons why he gets involved in saving old structures.

He said it reduces the need to build new, expensive infrastructure and it can be a factor in convincing young professionals to build lives and careers in Fargo.

“If you’ve got an interesting, revitalized urban core, then you have a better chance of retaining people in our area,” he said.