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### **Housing for youth pursued YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES UNLIMITED: Goal is to showcase an older building with youth housing while going green on the roof**

There's a picture of him on his office wall, looking for all the world like a long-distance runner. Accompanying it is the information he once ran the Boston Marathon in just seconds over three hours and three minutes.

Pretty impressive for an amateur who joined a running club mainly for the exercise and camaraderie of running mates.

"I couldn't do that time now," says Steve Cordes, executive director of You Opportunities Unlimited (YOU), looking as if he could -- lean and fit.

It strikes you there's a connection between preparing for and finishing a marathon and the reason you're here -- YOU's plan for a rooftop garden, crowning the building on the northeast corner of Richmond and York streets it acquired in December 2007.

"This building isn't just about affordable housing for young people," he said. "It's about showcasing what can be done with older buildings and going green at the same time."

From the get-go, plans have included an 8,000-square-foot rooftop garden and environmental features that would turn the former hotel/tavern/residence into a certified green building.

"We've talked to the Sisters of St. Joseph about what they've done with their new building under the national LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program," says Cordes. "We want to do something similar with our building."

The goal is to provide affordable housing, preserve heritage and go green on top -- all in one youth centre project, Cordes says.

Because a rooftop garden was always in the plans, the building had to be renovated and restored with that in mind, says Cordes.

"We had to make sure the rooftop could take the weight and that the features could be supported in the future."

Plans also call for small windmills and solar panels to generate power, geothermal heating and cooling and a water collection system to recycle water and decrease storm runoff.

"We'll be able to grow flowers, fruits and vegetables on the roof and provide a beautiful outdoor environment," says Cordes.

The rooftop garden will cost about \$750,000.

"We have the vision but we don't have the money," he says. "We have to raise the money and we're looking at a number of options for that. We think it's achievable. The cost isn't too scary."

The garden is a distance down the road, but since YOU acquired the property from developer Schmuell Farhi, old hotel rooms have been refurbished and turned into bachelor and one-bedroom apartments YOU rents out for \$330 a month.

"They're great places to be for a year or two while you're finding your feet or going back to school," Cordes says.

YOU bought the building from Farhi after he gave them \$1 million to help with the purchase.

The main floor is being renovated to include a high school upgrading and apprenticeship training centre, an entertainment/recreation area, offices and a public cafe that will be the front end of a food preparation kitchen and training operation.