



## **Spruce Goose Nest to Become Offices**

Roger Vincent

October 16, 2010

*South Florida Sun-Sentinel*

The decaying former headquarters of aviation giant Howard Hughes will be turned into an office campus for creative tenants as part of a \$50 million makeover of his famous operation.

The complex includes the enormous hangar where Hughes built his infamous Spruce Goose airplane, a space now used mostly as a soundstage for movies and TV.

The seven-story structure will be upgraded to contain multiple soundstages that could be used simultaneously, new owner Wayne Ratkovich said.

Ratkovich, a Los Angeles developer who specializes in renovating historic buildings, expects to complete a \$32.4 million purchase of the former Hughes property this month. His company and his financial partner are buying the 28-acre parcel out of foreclosure.

The property is occupied by 11 buildings, including the hangar, most of them from around World War II when Hughes operated his Hughes Aircraft Co. near what is now Los Angeles International Airport. It was there that Hughes set out to build the massive seaplane dubbed the Spruce Goose.

The plane is long gone, but the vast redwood hangar where it was built is still in demand as a soundstage and generates about \$1.3 million a year in rent from filmmakers, Ratkovich said. Much of director James Cameron's 3-D epic "Avatar" was shot there.

In a nod to Hughes' seaplane, officially called Hercules, Ratkovich will call his new development the Hercules Campus. Targeted tenants include media, entertainment and technology companies.

"We want those kind of firms that are looking for unconventional space," he said. "That's what these buildings represent."

### **A billionaire and his plane**

The man: Howard Hughes set out to build a seaplane capable of carrying 750 soldiers nonstop from Honolulu to Tokyo. No plane that big had been built, and he couldn't use materials considered crucial to the war effort. He decided to use birch, leading to the nickname Spruce Goose that was irksome to him.

The plane: Officially dubbed Hercules, it had a 320-foot wingspan, weighed 200 tons and flew only once, for about one minute, in 1947.

Today: The plane is in a McMinnville, Ore., museum.

The massive hangar where Howard Hughes built the Spruce Goose airplane is part of a 28-acre site once owned by the aviation giant that is turning into an office campus.