

Watergate Capitalizes

By Peter Oshos
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The plush Watergate complex, site of the celebrated break-in and bugging of the Democratic Party headquarters, has achieved notoriety that makes it a present-day tourist attraction and assures it a somewhat dubious place in history.

That, at least, is the view of Lee Elsen, the amiable vice president of the Watergate company. But he also insists that from a business standpoint, the glossy veneer of the \$77 million apartment-hotel-office complex has not been besmirched.

"I think Watergate will go into the language," Elsen observed in an interview yesterday, "like Teapot Dome. Watergate will al-

ways have the connotation of political espionage." Teapot Dome was the Wyoming oil site that came to symbolize the scandals of the Harding administration in the 1920s.

But Elsen contends that the Watergate image is still that of the swankiest address in town—"a new concept in urban living," he calls it—and tenants are flocking in, filling up apartments that sell for up to \$300,000 a clip and offices that carry equally formidable price tags.

As for tourists, Elsen says—and leading sightseeing companies confirm—the Watergate is now pointed out to visitors as they rumble by in buses.

"We tell them that's the

place they've read about in the papers," said one guide.

Watergate has started billing itself as "the best known office building in the world (you surely won't have to explain where you are)".

Recently, Elsen and his colleagues decided to turn their complex's image into a promotional ploy. They took out large advertisements in the Washington papers, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times declaring: "Don't be bugged with the commonplace. This spring indulge yourself."

"Let us," the ad continues, "put a bug in your ear."

The occasion for the sales pitch was the impending move of the Democratic National Committee that, after six years, is giving up its Watergate offices for

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on 'Bug' as Democrats

smaller quarters at the Airline Pilots Association Building at 1625 Massachusetts Avenue NW. ("With pilots' defense against high jacking and Democrats' experience in burglary," a current DNC newsletter notes, "a new coalition for law and order is possible.")

Elsen says he is sorry to lose the Democrats and even offered them inducements to stay in the form of a relative bargain on rents that now run about \$9,300 a month, but the Democrats had made up their minds.

"We've lost two elections since we've been in the building," Joe Carter, the DNC's director of communications said yesterday, "We're going to get a new office and some new luck."

And then, he added, DNC employes continue to have inhibitions about using their telephones. "There is," he said, "nervous concern. People have to feel confidence in their environment. We're going to emit confidence and win those elections in 1974-76."

After the intruders were caught rummaging through the office and anteroom of then DNC chairman Lawrence F. O'Brien in the early hours of June 17 and the eavesdropping equipment was located, the Democrats installed an elaborate new security system to prevent a recurrence.

A new double lock and alarms were put in at the front entrance, with wires extending elsewhere. The

system, Carter said, turned out to cause "terrific problems," because people would forget, among other things, to use both keys, setting off the alarms.

Building guards, another DNC official said, simply turned off the system because of the noise. Finally, in January, the system was removed.

Despite all the talk of bugs in the new Watergate ad, there is nothing said about improved security. Instead, the building's luxury and amenities are stressed. But Elsen insists that the complex is as safe as it could be. "After all," he said, "the burglars were found by a Watergate guard."

Pleased with the success of the bug theme, Elsen plans to push it further. He

Move

has ordered thousands of tie clasps with small bugs on them to send to prospective tenants and friends.

One of the few big names to have moved out since the break-in is John N. Mitchell, the former attorney general, who was head of President Nixon's re-election committee at the time of the incident.

One additional wrinkle to Watergate's fame is a new strip show at a downtown Washington establishment. The program is called "Watergate Follies!"

Don Costello, the show's master of ceremonies, said that really nothing additional had been added to the usual fare.

"It's like anything in show business," he said yesterday. "It's the popular thing, so you groove into it."