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High-Rise Homes for Durban's High Fliers

In what is believed to be a first for Durban, a high-rise Berea office building has been converted into stylish residential apartments to provide a much-needed boost for the affordable accommodation market.

Following their sell-out success with similar high-rise conversions in Johannesburg's city centre, Aengus Lifestyle Properties has entered the Durban property scene with the transformation of the landmark 14-floor Berea Centre into 133 contemporary-styled bachelor and studio loft apartments.

Richard Rubin, MD of Aengus Lifestyle Properties and a Durbanite himself, says the properties, which are available to rent or to purchase, bring a new concept of urban community living to the city.

The 130 top-end apartments and three glass-fronted penthouses are perched atop 21 877m² of retail space, which is currently being refurbished to the tune of R40m by the building's owners, JSE-listed ApexHi Properties. The upgrade will be completed by the end of June 2007 and has attracted an exciting tenant mix including a number of national retailers such as Pick 'n Pay, Woolworths and Mr Price plus 40 specialist stores.

"The Berea Lofts is based on the European concept of having residential accommodation above commercial interests," Rubin added. "Residents not only have direct access to a huge variety of amenities, but they are also within a stone's throw of major bus and taxi routes and a two-minute walk to the CBD. With this combination, I believe that the Berea Lofts will serve its tenancy better than any of our previous buildings."

Priced from around R250 000, the lofts are designed to appeal to the growing number of middle-income earners who desire a sophisticated, secure lifestyle. The apartments all have spectacular views of the sea and the suburbs and have been finished to exacting standards, including hobs, insulated walling, 24 hour security, biometric access control and DSTV.

"A key advantage," continues Rubin's partner Gavin Meskin, Managing Director of Aengus Property Management, "will be the ongoing management of the building. As is the case with our successful Johannesburg properties, the Berea Lofts will be managed by Aengus Property Management (APM) which has a proven track record which includes managing its properties at 100% tenancy with waiting lists, zero arrears and control of the bodies corporate.

"Many bodies corporate under-budget and hence their buildings fail," said Gavin Meskin, MD of APM. "Because we have a vested interest in our buildings, we ensure that levies are paid and that the building is managed within our policy of a generous 40% ratio of income to expenses. We want our community to enjoy a top level lifestyle at an affordable price."

Aengus' Lifestyle Card and its popular Loft in a Box furniture package will also be introduced with the launch of the Berea Lofts. The Lifestyle Card offers residents discounts from local

suppliers such as the gym, DVD store and beauty salons while the Loft in a Box provides customers with top quality, custom-designed furniture and accessories at wholesale prices.

"The furniture has been specially designed to complement the contemporary look and feel of the interiors and to optimise the space available," said Loft in a Box GM Dean Solomon. "It's a unique concept that enables residents to furnish an entire apartment in one go, and is available to the wider public, not just Aengus residents. Furniture is available in various colour schemes and styles."

Rubin believes the Durban property market is ripe for the creation of what he terms 'lifestyle precincts' which attract commercial and residential interests that share a common theme into a designated area. He said Aengus was aggressively looking for stock, either office blocks to convert or distressed residential accommodation to upgrade.

"Our model has proved its worth," he said, 'and we believe there is huge upside potential for investors in and around Durban. As an indicator of the growth potential of the area, ApexHi believes that its investment in the Berea Centre should deliver a return in excess of 13% and stimulate foot traffic in excess of 600 000 per month."