

Charter high school to open in Loop

By Eddie Baeb
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(Crain's) — A charter high school named after prominent attorney Allan Muchin is set to open downtown next year in a vintage high-rise building on State Street.

Noble Network of Charter Schools will open Muchin College Prep next August at 1 N. State St., the former Wieboldt's Building, with an incoming freshman class of about 175 students.

Muchin will be the first high school in the Loop, where the population of college students and dormitories has been expanding in recent years, and the eighth campus for Noble. By its fourth year, when there are four grade levels, Muchin will probably have about 550 to 700 students.

Mr. Muchin, a founding partner of Chicago-based law firm Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP, says he first became involved with Noble as a board member about eight years ago, when there was just the one campus, Noble Street College Prep, which opened in 1999 at 1010 N. Noble St. on the Northwest Side.

Noble Network signed a 20-year lease for 67,000 square feet at 1 N. State, the entire seventh floor including a mezzanine level. In addition to the new school, the space will accommodate Noble Network's administrative offices and a cafeteria that will prepare meals for students at Muchin and most other Noble campuses.

"The location at 1 N. State offers so many possibilities with its proximity to businesses, the various college campuses, the Museum Campus, city and state government," says Ron Manderschied, president and CEO of Noble Network. "We're really looking at how all of those things could come together as enhancements to the base curriculum."

Muchin will be the second school at 1 N. State, joining a longtime tenant there, the International Academy of Design & Technology. The two schools will share a new, separate entrance and lobby in the 16-story office and retail building, which was built in 1912 and designed by architecture firm Holabird & Roche.



1 N. State St. Photo from CoStar Group Inc.

The building has about 650,000 square feet of office space on the upper levels, which White Plains, N.Y.-based real estate investment firm Stonewater Partners bought last year. The retail space, which includes Filene's Basement and T. J. Maxx, is separately owned.

The Noble deal brings the office space to just more than 60% leased, says Mike Watts, a senior vice-president with Chicago-based J. F. McKinney & Associates, who represents the landlord.

Mr. Watts says Noble was attracted to the building's location, its large floors and the "bifurcated lobby." Another draw, he says, was the substantial capital improvements Stonewater is making to the building's interior and exterior, including new energy-efficient windows that will help the school obtain Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) gold certification.

Noble was represented in the lease by ProTen Realty Group, a Chicago-based brokerage, and was also advised by the real estate services group of non-profit advisory firm IFF, formerly the Illinois Facilities Fund.

IFF helped bring in ProTen and the project's architect, Wheeler Kearns, and also provided a \$1-million loan for the project to augment a primary \$4-million loan from Northern Trust Corp., says Dan Alexander, a senior project manager with IFF.

Mr. Alexander says the construction project for the school totals about \$10.4 million, and that Noble received a \$4-million tenant-improvement allowance from the landlord for the work.

The school also received about \$2 million from private patrons, including Mr. Muchin and his wife, Elaine, and Bruce Rauner, principal and chairman of Chicago-based private-equity firm GTCR Golder Rauner LLC.

Noble, which opened its second and third campuses just two years ago, is a non-selective charter school, in which Chicago students are chosen through a lottery to attend the school, which is free, and don't have to pass an entrance exam to be admitted. Noble also gets financial support from the Chicago Public Schools.

With seven schools now, Noble says three-quarters of its students enter with below grade-level performance and that more than 85% of its graduating seniors go on to college.

"I think this is the future of good education for the masses," Mr. Muchin says. "I think we're on the right track."

Other business leaders have also gotten involved with Noble. Last year, the school opened the Rowe-Clark Math & Science Academy, with \$4.2 million donated by Exelon Corp. and company executives John Rowe and Frank Clark. This year, one of two new Noble schools to open was Gary Comer College Prep, named after the late founder of clothier Lands' End.

Noble's other new school, which is slated to open next fall and is still looking for a location on the West Side, will be Chicago Bulls College Prep. In 2010, Noble plans to open its 10th school, Osborn College Prep, with contributions from Northern Trust and the firm's chairman and former CEO William Osborn.