

Three



Because the 14-story building core changes size at the eighth floor, pre-planning was necessary to accommodate the shift.

PNC Plaza

A CATALYST FOR DOWNTOWN RENAISSANCE

■ By Michael Linder

Just over 100 years ago, Pittsburgh was on the eve of a major transformation. The city's famous steel industry was just finding its footing and by the early 1900s, Pittsburgh was a bustling metropolis with a lucrative manufacturing base. This strength lasted until the steel industry collapsed in the 1970s, leaving the city with a dramatically reduced population and a struggling economy. While the economy of the city has been able to rebound, through a rise in industries like healthcare, medicine, high technology and education, much of the new development has occurred outside of the downtown area.

Today, Pittsburgh is in the midst of an economic revitalization effort to rival its transformation of a hundred years ago. President Barack Obama chose Pittsburgh as the site for the 2009 G20 Summit, in recognition of the city's economic recovery and its role in leading sustainability. Shortly thereafter, Pittsburgh was announced as the host city for the 37th annual World Environment Day on June 5, 2010, which was launched by the United Nations General Assembly to promote environmental issues and sustainable development.

Three PNC Plaza, located at Fifth and Market Streets, is downtown Pittsburgh's first new high-rise building in two decades, seeking several LEED certifications for its various components. The mixed-use project is comprised of offices for PNC Financial Services Group (PNC) and Reed Smith (an international law firm), a four-star

Fairmont Hotel, 28 luxury condominiums, retail space and a 334-space underground garage.

Astorino collaborated with Gensler Architects, an international firm headquartered in San Francisco, and with Seattle-based sustainable building consultants, Paladino and Company on the project. PNC Financial Services Group selected the firms as part of an aggressive endeavor to rebuild one of the city's more depressed downtown areas. Astorino, who designed PNC Firstside Center, PNC's LEED Silver-certified office and operations hub on First Avenue, provided all of the engineering for the building's core and shell, as well as the complete engineering for the Fairmont Hotel. The goal was to develop an aesthetically stunning, environmentally-friendly, and technologically advanced building, on a budget of almost \$200 million.

Ultimately, Three PNC Plaza will be one of the largest sustainable, mixed-use buildings in the country, with 750,000 square feet and 23 stories, plus two full mezzanine levels, making it 25 stories tall. Along with enhancing the architectural landscape of downtown Pittsburgh, Three PNC will help usher in the city's next major transformation, from industrial powerhouse to lively and diverse metropolis.

Taking the LEED

Prior to construction at Three PNC Plaza, the site was the home of several low-rise buildings. It is the culmination of a series of projects that PNC initiated on 5th Avenue, home to the company's corporate headquarters. According to **Gary Saulson**, Director of Corporate Real Estate for PNC, the company began to revitalize this portion of Downtown Pittsburgh 15 years ago. Starting with One PNC and moving

west along Fifth Avenue, site by site, the company was careful not to purchase a new site, until the adjacent project was complete. By taking this approach, PNC was able to avoid any potential “hole-in-the-doughnut” situations where they might be unable to purchase a particular site in the row.

“This project is very much tied to our strategy as a company to do as much as we can for the city and to serve as a positive inspiration for others,” said Saulson. “In fact, the entire area of Pittsburgh known as The Fifth-Forbes Corridor, which begins right across the street from us, has either been developed or is under development since we started the work at Three PNC Plaza.” The development strategy worked well, and the company now owns One, Two and Three PNC, creating a campus for the corporation and a desirable location for those visiting, working and living in the community. With 66 newly constructed LEED-certified buildings, PNC took a highly visible area in need of redevelopment and upgraded it to an entirely new level. This address is now a major city destination.

While the building’s LEED certifications are pending, Three PNC Plaza is a modern, fresh and welcome

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The construction of Three PNC Plaza coincides with Pittsburgh’s 250th birthday.

addition to Pittsburgh’s skyline. The full-glass curtainwall facade is highly detailed, and required immense coordination to accomplish the design goals. The high performance glass and aluminum curtainwall helps the building meet some of its stringent environmental and sustainability goals. Fifty percent of the construction materials used in the project are sustainable or recycled, and the site features high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, including an energy recovery system, as well as drought-resistant landscaping. PNC also developed a small public park – PNC Triangle Park – across Market Street from The Fairmont’s entrance, which is now open and providing respite for the area’s pedestrians.

“In our minds, there is no question that LEED is the way to go. For PNC, it’s the only way we build,” adds Saulson. “There are so many resources out there to help make the process easy and it’s a third-party seal of approval, letting everyone know that the building meets – and sometimes exceeds – environmental standards that are nationally recognized and approved.”

Mixed-use Creates Mixed Impact

From the beginning, Three PNC Plaza was going to be a mixed-use building. PNC did a complete study of Pittsburgh’s needs and a mixed-use building “just made sense” according to Saulson. “As we work to revitalize the urban core in our cities, mixed-use developments add a lot of vitality and interest to the project and neighborhood,” he said. The Fairmont Hotel in particular will help serve the city’s convention center and other venues, which are currently not supported with enough hotel space.



Three PNC Plaza, Pittsburgh's first skyscraper built in the last 20 years, contains office space, condominiums and a Fairmont Hotel. The mixed-use tower features a three-story, 100,000-square-foot underground parking garage offering 330 parking spaces.

In addition to helping bolster the city's convention and tourism trade, the site also houses 28 luxury condominiums. In the last three to five years there have been several new condominium projects in downtown Pittsburgh, and this building is a much-needed continuation of that trend. As the city becomes more vibrant, people need to live and work in the downtown area. That is the only way the city's revitalization efforts can succeed.

But along with the benefits of undertaking a vast mixed-use project came a few challenges. At the very heart of this mixed-use building's implementation have been a variety of competing timelines and developing technical requirements. How do you share amenities between the hotel and the condominiums? How do you reconcile office tenant occupancy deadlines against the maturing design of an upscale hotel project? How do you service daily residential tenants alongside

visitors in the underground parking garage, and still create a pleasant experience?

Given that this is a mixed-use building, each aspect of the project was on a different timeline. At the time this article was written, the first office tenant has taken occupancy, but the hotel construction was still underway and targeted to be completed in late March 2010. While proceeding with the construction of the core and shell of the structure, the design of the hotel and condominiums were still being finalized. Additionally, the spaces for the building's primary office tenants were on a fast track for occupancy. As a result, several changes to the base building systems occurred during construction, to maintain the functionality of the building. When changes to the project did surface, it took the understanding, cooperation, persistence and dedication of every member of the design and development team to keep the project mov-

ing forward. Each of these partners in the project worked hand-in-hand to succeed within the budget, timeframe, and in accordance with the design goals.

Astorino has a long-standing relationship with PNC and given the company's roots in the community and size of the project, an immense amount of pride is involved for the end product. Three PNC Plaza is at a crossroads between Pittsburgh's 20-year old and successful cultural district development and a planned academic village. It is near the convention center, the business community and the developing Fifth-Forbes Corridor. It is a crowning sustainable achievement that rounds out the PNC vision for what downtown Pittsburgh was and will be again. ■

By **Michael Linder**, senior vice president, architecture, Astorino.

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