

REAL ESTATE

By Debbie L. Sklar

Downtown Hero

San Diego developer Doug Wilson is the man of the moment



THE BIG APPLE may have The Donald, but San Diego has The Doug.

For more than two decades Doug Wilson, the president and CEO of Douglas Wilson Cos. and Wilson Properties LP, has been at the forefront of the revitalization and development of downtown San Diego. Although he may not be as recognizable as Donald Trump, The Doug is ubiquitous in San Diego real estate circles, a driving force in putting the city on the map.

“The transformation that has been happening downtown is stunning and amazing,” he says. “It’s a remarkable change, especially in the 22 years that I’ve been here. It’s turned into this real hip, hap-

pening place, and the population downtown will soon be at 30,000 residents. Ten years ago, it was 10,000. The resurgence of downtown San Diego in the last seven years is probably, in the analogy of baseball, in ‘about the third or fourth inning of a longer game.’”

And he should know, since he’s a nationally recognized authority in problem resolution, and real estate development and management issues.

Wilson, 55, who has offices in San Diego, Denver, San Francisco and Atlanta, became well known in the San Diego community when his com-

pany built the \$160 million Symphony Towers complex. A decade and a half later, the 1.2-million-square-foot, dual-tower office-and-hotel project remains the largest privately financed mixed-use development in downtown San Diego. In 1994, it was recognized as “The Finest Project over 500,000 Square Feet” by the Building Owners and Managers Association International, receiving The Office Building of The Year award.

EARLY INKLINGS

Wilson says his interest in downtown San Diego began brewing years ago when he had some insights about what was eventually to happen to the city.

A vanguard in the revitalization of downtown San Diego, developer Doug Wilson continues to add architectural diversity throughout San Diego County and beyond.



“When it was first talked about in the 1990s that there was interest in a ballpark, I saw the impact that other ballparks had had on the evolution and revolution of a number of other downtown cities,” he says.

“When I saw it was going to be plopped down in the center of San Diego and open to center field, I quickly tied up two city blocks adjacent to center field. Even though it was a blighted area, I knew that it would have huge value.”

Not everyone shared his vision. “People laughed and thought I was crazy, but they don’t laugh much anymore,” he chuckles. “I’m saying that I had a vision and some forethought, which can be helpful in this business.”

Wilson, a Chicago native, believed then and still believes today that downtown has “mammoth potential.”

“Downtown had the potential infrastructure already years ago and I think because we are a society that is tired of driving on the freeway, that the revitalization was bound to happen,” he shares. “Cities now want to look back inward and redevelop their cores, which is a trend being duplicated all over the country or, for that matter, all over the world.”

MORE SUCCESS

Back in 2002, Wilson’s company again reset the standard, this time in downtown residential offerings, with the highly acclaimed Parkloft condominium lofts project. One block north of Petco Park, Parkloft is testimony to Wilson’s belief in the potential for the newly emerging East Village to become one of the most diverse and exciting urban neighborhoods in the city.

In addition, the company’s newest project, The Mark, located directly across from Parkloft, expands on Wilson’s commitment to create the new urban core of downtown. The Mark, where homes will start at \$400,000, is scheduled to open in March 2007. Ground was broken

in September 2004. Its 33 floors will rise 380 feet, making it the tallest building in downtown San Diego’s East Village. The Mark will also introduce a new style of architecture to downtown San Diego’s skyline, making it an expression of a quality downtown living experience, Wilson says.

“We’re excited about this project because we strive to be different,” he says. “We like to do nice projects that aren’t cookie-cutter, and we want to build projects that are lasting. This is our largest project downtown, [and] will look like it’s right out of Chicago when it’s completed. It will be incredible when it’s done; it will

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— Doug Wilson

have 244 units and you’ll be looking right down the center at the pitcher’s mound.”

In addition, the \$155 million project will feature 13 penthouses, as well as 8,062 square feet of retail space. There will be 11 town homes which will face 8th, 9th and Island Avenues.

The Mark will offer all the conveniences

of living in San Diego’s newest and largest redevelopment district—East Village. Situated two blocks from the ballpark and just three blocks from the Gaslamp District, residents of The Mark will be within minutes of sporting events, dozens of restaurants and bars, unique shopping opportunities and cultural activities.

LOOKING AHEAD

Wilson, who grew up outside of Chicago and moved to Denver in 1968, holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in pre-law from the University of Denver.

“I didn’t go to school to learn what I do today, but I became intrigued by buildings when I lived in Denver in the 1970s during the energy boom,” he recalls. “I was around all these world-class architects and developers who came from all over the world to build these amazing buildings. I decided that I wanted to do that when I grew up and I realized that I had to place myself in a position on how to learn that,” he says.

After entering a number of partnerships and surrounding himself with industry professionals, he and his wife moved to San Diego. The rest, he says, is history. “I’m glad we made the move. I think San Diego has the best architecture in the country,” he adds.

His contributions to the San Diego skyline will continue. One never to rest on his laurels, Wilson has a number of other exciting projects in the pipeline, including

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a 157-unit mixed-use project in Chula Vista situated on seven acres. Another project, near San Diego State University, will be the conversion of an old Albertsons store on 10 acres into a mixed-use property offering residential and retail.

"It's in the middle of a redevelopment area that will radically change in the long term and we should be starting that later this year," he says. "I'm very bullish on the real estate market in the long term. I think we could see periodic slowdowns due to radical construction costs and absorption like we have lately. However, I do think it will continue to be [a] vibrant and mature market."

In his spare time, Wilson enjoys skiing, tennis, golf, fly fishing and working with junior athletic organizations. As for his opinion of Donald Trump, who many have compared him, Wilson says, "There may be some similarities in some of the things that we have done or the legacies we have left as far as quality and the uniqueness of the projects, but I am a remarkably different person than he is. I pride myself on being a very centered and a well grounded person that isn't an egotist."

Wilson also is a family and community-minded person, who has never lost sight of his origins.

"I may have some notoriety and success, and I am proud of that, but to be balanced in everything you do is the key to long-term success," he advises.

Debbie L. Sklar is a frequent contributor to various Southern California lifestyle and business publications.

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