

A tale of two developers by

Becky Brun - 11.1.06

With Mount Rainier looming in the east and Lake Washington to the west, residents in Bellevue, Wash., typically don't complain about the view. At last count, however, nine tower cranes spanned the downtown skyline. It's a sign of changing times in Seattle's biggest suburb.

One of 10 new developments in Bellevue's budding town center, Bellevue Towers is a 43-story, 1-million-square-foot mixed-use building expected to receive Gold LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. It's the first Seattle project for Gerding Edlen, a green building giant internationally known for urban redevelopment efforts in Portland's Brewery Blocks and South Waterfront District. When completed in August 2009, it could also become the largest LEEDcertified residential project in Washington state.



Gerding Edlen's Bellevue Towers

Since passing its Green Building Policy in early 2000, Seattle has certified 25 LEED projects, more than any other city (however, Portland has more certified LEED projects per capita). Until now, Vulcan Inc., lead developer of Seattle's South Lake Union redevelopment project, has been the primary force behind the city's green building movement, according to Peter Dobrovolny, LEED commercial expert for Seattle's City Green Building program. "They have done more than anyone else at this time," he says.

But Gerding Edlen has been paying close attention to Seattle's real estate market. Seattle's proximity to Portland, along with the company's focus on urban redevelopment, led Gerding Edlen north, says Scott Eaton, Bellevue Towers' project manager. Eaton says he traveled to Seattle weekly for the past two years to investigate suitable opportunities.



Room with a view: Bellevue Towers residents will have curved glass walls and views of the Olympic and Cascade Mountains. Courtesy Gerding Edlen.

"We pride ourselves on projects that might lead to other projects," Eaton says. "Bellevue is this place where all kinds of dynamics intersect. There are a huge number of jobs there

and key stakeholders want greater density. From an urban developer standpoint, the only piece missing is the residential and entertainment-oriented retail." Recipient of numerous awards, ranging from environmental design and construction to energy-efficiency, Gerding Edlen is well-known in Portland and beyond for its environmental approach to urban redevelopment.

"They really have broken new ground," says Michael Armstrong, green building program manager for the City of Portland's Office of Sustainable Development. "They have made green building the core of their business plan, and they have made a lot of money because of it. Their buildings command a premium because they're green, and at the same time Gerding Edlen is showing how building green can be done affordably."

The Portland Brewery Blocks include 1.7 million square feet of retail, office and residential housing in addition to parking space. All the buildings were designed to LEED Silver or Gold standards. In October, another Gerding Edlen project, the Portland Armory building, became the first LEED Platinum building on the National Register of Historic Places. And in Portland's South Waterfront project, each building is expected to achieve at least LEED Silver, with the exception of the Oregon Health & Science University Center for Health and Healing, projected to earn Platinum.

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Lobby of the Bellevue Towers

Many Gerding Edlen projects are located near downtown and within close proximity to Portland's 5-year-old

streetcar line, allowing residents to get to and from work, stores, restaurants and entertainment without getting into a car. Eaton says it's one of the best things an urban planner can do for the health of the environment, the residents and the economy.

Because of growing traffic woes in Puget Sound, Eaton says the most innovative thing Gerding Edlen can do in its development plans there is to give people transportation choices other than getting into their cars to drive to work every day.

"I know that sounds overly simplistic, but it's a trend that we've been following and we believe in it," he says. "Any place where you are bringing residents back or adding residents to a downtown location, it will have an impact on the quality of life of those people and on the environment."

Seattle is currently retrofitting what was the downtown bus tunnel to accommodate a central light rail line expected to deliver passengers to the Sea-Tac Airport beginning in 2009. A proposed East Link extension would connect downtown Seattle, Bellevue and Redmond via Interstate 90 and Mercer Island. The eastbound line could come within a few blocks of Bellevue Towers.

Less than 12 miles away, along the south end of Seattle's Lake Union, a new 1.3-mile Seattle Streetcar line is under construction. The line between South Lake Union and downtown is expected to be completed in 2007, largely due to Vulcan's efforts, says Ethan Malone, strategic planner for the Seattle streetcar project. In its first year, the line could accommodate up to 300,000 passengers, including 3,000 Seattle Biomedical Research Institute employees. The \$51 million project is expected to be paid for by public money and private land owners via a local improvement district tax.

When Paul Allen first acquired 10 acres on South Lake Union in 1996, the real estate division of Vulcan Inc. was just three people, says Alison Jeffries, Vulcan's senior real estate marketing manager. Allen planned to donate the land to the Seattle Commons project, a citizenled initiative to create a green space similar to New York's Central Park. But when the initiative failed twice, Allen's vision for the land changed dramatically.

Vulcan Real Estate, which now employs 50 people and owns 60 acres around South Lake Union, has undertaken one of the most ambitious urban redevelopment projects the city has ever seen. Staying true to its roots in the Seattle Commons project, Vulcan and its joint venture partners contributed \$650,000 to help fund the city's renovation of Cascade Park in South Lake Union, and it donated \$10 million for the renovation of the 12-acre Lake Union Park.

Since 2004, Vulcan has completed nearly 1.4 million square feet of new development, and another 600,000 square feet are currently under construction. All buildings are designed to meet LEED standards, many of which are firsts for Seattle [see "Alley 24: The new face of office space," Sustainable Industries, March 2006]. Finished in 2004, the new Seattle Biomedical Research Institute building is Seattle's first LEED Core and Shell project to earn a

Silver rating.



Residents in the transit-oriented Alcyone development can easily walk to Cascade Park or hop on a bus to downtown Seattle. *Steven Keating, Courtesy Vulcan.*

Opened in 2004, Alcyone is an eight-story, 161-unit apartment building which became Seattle's first new market-rate, multi-family building to receive LEED certification. Alley24, a 360,000-square-foot office, retail and residential project is expected to achieve LEED Silver. In October, residents began moving into 2200 Westlake, a three-tower, 550,000-square-foot building that includes a mix of 260 condominiums, a Pan Pacific five-star hotel, a 47,000-square-foot Whole Foods, and dozens of restaurants and retailers.

"We've gotten to know Vulcan," Eaton says. "They are doing great stuff in South Lake Union. They have the ability to do whatever they want to do, but they are making a commitment to sustainability. They are on course to continue to do projects by being sustainable, environmentally and financially."

Vulcan's core customers are the creative class, especially companies that rely on the intellectual capital of their employees. One example is Alley24 designer and tenant, NBBJ Architects. In February 2006, the firm moved from Seattle's Pioneer Square to what lead architect Brent Rogers calls a "hybrid office building."

"Some of the features that we've incorporated are trying to provide all tenants flexibility about how they want to approach heating, cooling and fresh air," Rogers says. "We know that people are feeling better; there's better morale, higher productivity and fewer sick days."

Exterior motorized sun shades, operable windows and an under-floor air system help residents moderate the building's temperature throughout the year. Ceilings are two feet higher than typical office buildings, allowing warm air to escape through the high windows and increased sunlight to flood in. The project also includes 700 square feet of accessible rooftop decks and gardens, a Flexcar and secure bike storage.

Vulcan's focus on green building grew from its "triple bottom line" approach to real estate, Jeffries says. The company evaluates potential real estate projects and measures its success according to three criteria: community, environmental and financial accountability.

A similar philosophy holds true at Gerding Edlen.

"It was a commitment on the part of the two founders of the company," says Renee Worme, Gerding Edlen's sustainability manager. "They take to heart the impact of the products that they create. They wanted to respond to growing environmental concerns."

In October, Bob Gerding was awarded a 2006 BetterBricks award for his commitment to sustainable, high performance building standards reaching back to the early 1990s. He was also recognized as the 2006 Honored Citizen by the Architecture Foundation of Oregon.

It might not be long before Gerding climbs the ranks in Seattle.

"I think we are going to have a much larger presence here in the next couple of years," Eaton says. "I think there's a good group of developers up here, and I think we complement that group."

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