



Visionaries at Stiles Corporation

Bring the neighborhood to downtown

BY LESLIE MCKERNS

John Ruskin, renowned art, architecture and society critic wrote, “When love and skill work together, expect a masterpiece,” more than two centuries ago, but the words still serve as inspiration to the team at Stiles Corporation, based in Fort Lauderdale.

With over 32 million square feet of development, the Stiles Corporation has shaped Fort Lauderdale into a social city, creating many of the signature downtown and iconic structures currently defining the city and streetscape. Those include the buildings at 300 and 350 Las Olas Place, Las Olas Centre and Bank of America Plaza at Las Olas City Center.

Driven to build a legacy of high quality architecture, Stiles has focused on creating a dynamic skyline with people-friendly streetscapes. Rather than simply creating the expected urban walls, the team at Stiles Corporation builds vibrant downtown spaces with a sense of place, drawing people to the area.

“We’ve had the vision of creating a people-oriented downtown for more than two decades,” said Doug Eagon, president of Stiles Corporation. “The inspirational ingredient is an environment very different from suburbia—where people want to be.”

“In an urban environment, you have the pleasure of doing business while seeing other people. Because much of life is informal, networking done this way is much more effective. People are outside enjoying the weather and each other, and it is a subtle but electric way of conducting business,” said Eagon.

Eagon regards Fort Lauderdale as one of the best cities in Florida and the United States. With a denser population than its northern counterpart Boca Raton, Eagon has made Fort Lauderdale a pedestrian town, placing activity centers adjacent to neighborhoods.

“We have a dynamic central business district and a true downtown in its best definition with a combination of functions, not just offices. You can walk to the beach, downtown or a museum. In a half mile radius you have hundreds of restaurants, cultural and educational centers, including the Performing Arts Center, Florida Atlantic University and Broward Community College”

According to Eagon, Fort Lauderdale’s growth is imperative, necessary for for the area’s restaurants, cultural and institutional landmarks to survive and thrive. Eagon is aware that builders are responsible for the surrounding neighborhood, and, as such, should be proud of the area and their work. In order for the urban lifestyle of live-work-play the Stiles Corporation has created to succeed, it needs to be supported by a dense residential population.

Moving into this arena, Eagon might even consider ideas like putting a grocery store within a retail building, car showrooms inside a mall or a creating a vertical rather than traditional horizontal large-scale retail/mixed-use building.

But only if the demographics were different. “In the real world you need economic feasibility and that means enough people. In

Chicago there is Watertower Place and the Hancock Building, but there are millions of people to support this scale; we do not have enough people in Fort Lauderdale to support seven levels of vertical retail.”

Determining the company's next mixed-use project and creating a working idea for these complex buildings are the most challenging obstacles these visionaries face. Land assembly is difficult as parcels are assembled from multiple owners. Government approvals are more complex because of the multiple functions and high construction costs. Building parking for a suburban project involves a simple flat lot while an urban project requires a parking garage. All these costs are absorbed into the overall feasibility numbers for the project. Yet, even with these growing costs, Eagon says there is a solid trend in mixed-use urban lifestyles mainly due to limited land space.

Adaptive reuse and reconfigured buildings offer all kinds of possibilities. However, Eagon noted that these projects are also driven by market demand and economic feasibility. “Markets have a way of adapting,” he said, “but if we cannot attract workers, we will not grow as an economy. We try to see it as a governmental problem, but the government has had little success with influencing the economic system.” Eagon pointed out that the public sector is reluctant to respond to a market driven economy; “rather than pay a higher wage, we try to make things less costly,” he added.

“Two things can happen—wages can rise or homes can become less expensive. Or a third element can enter—some form of subsidy, meaning someone will get a less expensive home because it will be paid for by someone who does not. In 2007, costs are market-driven. However well intended, we can talk

about affordability and mandates, but we must ultimately recognize that the developer is simply a conduit within the market. We do not control the economy—we build to a market demand. A developer can develop anywhere; if not economically feasible, it will not get built.”

Moving away from the globalization trend, more people are feeling compelled to support local business and community initiatives, a trend the Stiles Corporation follows by buying services and commodities such as road rock, asphalt and concrete from local trades. “It is the nature of our business. Our firm employs hundreds of construction-related employees. Locally, we invest in charitable and cultural institutions, and we encourage our more than 500 employees to volunteer thousands of hours of their time, actively serving on boards and participating in the functions of major organizations such as Kids in Distress, Habitat for Humanity, Jack & Jill Children's Foundation and the Museum of Art.”

Terry Stiles, CEO and Chairman of the corporation, works with Eagon on the company's overall strategies. Stile's role is overall visioning and consensus building while Eagon oversees the day-to-day operations of the company, carrying out the vision on a daily basis.

Stiles Corporation has continued enthusiasm for the market, bringing a new project to Boca Raton, Reserve at Blue Lake on the Yamato, I-95 corridor. Eagon said, “Right now we are in a mid-cycle. We see the slowdown but do not see a severe recession on the horizon. We take a breath and wait for the demand to catch up.” ☒

Stiles Corporation is located at 300 SE 2nd Street, Suite 620 in Fort Lauderdale. 954.627.9300. www.stiles.com.

300 LAS OLAS PLACE



350 LAS OLAS PLACE CONDO

