

Rochester's Tower280 recognized for excellence in development

By: Brian Sharp and James Johnson, Rochester Democrat & Chronicle, April 4, 2017

When construction on Tower280 began almost three years ago, the late Larry Glazer beamed that it would stand as “the keystone of a new center city.”

He did not live to see its completion — or the recognition of his dream.

That recognition came this week, in historic Gotham Hall in Midtown Manhattan, when the Urban Land Institute New York honored the development with its award for excellence in repositioning or redevelopment. In doing so, the institute praised the project as “the most significant redevelopment in the Rochester region in decades,” calling the 17-story tower with its color-changing LED lighting, “a beacon” in the city skyline.

“I was tearing up on stage, when I was giving the acceptance speech,” said Ken Glazer, the younger son who became managing partner of his father’s Buckingham Properties. “I started saying, ‘This is for you, dad.’ I had to hold it together.”

The Urban Land Institute is one of, if not *the* largest development groups in the nation; a nonprofit education and research institute with 40,000 members worldwide, 2,500 in New York. The awards go beyond architecture or design to “recognize the full development process” while exemplifying ULI’s mission of responsible land use and sustainable communities.

Even making the shortlist was a surprise, Glazer said: “You think, ‘How could this compete with all those big, big projects. Just the money they have to spend.’ ”

Tower280, a \$59 million public-private partnership, was indeed dwarfed by the other two finalists: the \$1.5 billion expansion of the Jacob Javits Center in Manhattan, and the \$180 million New Stapleton Waterfront Phase I on Staten Island. Of the seven excellence awards given out on Monday, five went to developments in the Big Apple. The other exception was The Delaware North Building in Buffalo.

“Rochester is getting on the national stage for the first time in a long time for some positive reasons,” Ken Glazer said.

The local development includes 80,000 square feet of office space, 50,000 square feet of retail space, two-story penthouses among its 179 apartments and a three-story atrium with a skylight. There is a public space for local artists to use for displays and a rooftop lounge with a 2,000-square foot dog park. The redevelopment also added a two-story expansion at the base of the tower.

Today, all but four of the apartments are leased, Glazer said, with 85 percent renewals. Most of the commercial space has filled.

While the institute’s recognition went to the project, the project was about the family and the city. Said Glazer: “We knew the building was only half the message. A lot of it was the importance of community, and what it would stand for if it did succeed.” And what it would stand for if it didn’t.

Planning began in 2008, with Larry Glazer’s friend and colleague, Robert Morgan, being first in and Glazer joining later.

“This is, for me, a project my father and I were excited to do together. And with my brother, it was going to be the next big wave of Buckingham,” Ken Glazer said. “We were so excited for it, and nervous as could be.”

The ceremonial construction kickoff didn’t happen until May 2014. At the time, Larry Glazer had said the hard part in planning, financing, was over. Building would be the easy part. Four months later, the elder Glazer was flying his single-engine turboprop to Naples, Florida, with his wife, Jane, when the aircraft apparently lost cabin pressure. The couple lost consciousness, and the plane continued out over the Caribbean until crashing off the coast of Jamaica. They were 68.

Tower280 would prove to be “an uphill project” from beginning to end, presenting new challenges to the project team as well as the city. After the plane crash, it became: “We’ll do it for him. But he was the guy we wanted to ask all these questions to,” Ken Glazer said of his father.

“Eventually, we stopped asking, ‘What would Larry do?’ We know what to do.”

The award went to Midtown Tower LLC, a joint-venture of Buckingham Properties and Morgan Management. Others recognized included Pardi Partnership Architects, Philip Michael Brown Studio, EC4B Engineering, Jensen/BRV Engineering and Marathon Engineering. It marked the first time Buckingham, the city's largest taxpayer behind Rochester Gas & Electric, had entered the Urban Land Institute competition.

Other award winners included New York City's 51 Astor Place in Manhattan's East Village for excellence in office development, Navy Green in Brooklyn (housing development), Kathleen Grimm School for Leadership and Sustainability at Sandy Ground on Long Island (institutional), Delaware North Building in Buffalo (mixed-use), The Hills on Governors Island in New York City (civic space) and Beekman Hotel and Residences in lower Manhattan (hotel development).

"We had a great night," Ken Glazer said. "We did this for my father, and it probably is the last project he has his name stamped on. It's an award-winning example — of where the city is, (and) where the city is going."