

DENVER
**BUSINESS
 JOURNAL**

VOL. 57, NO. 46

MAY 19-25, 2006



This rendering shows Tower Two of the Landmark project being constructed in Greenwood Village.

Upstart developer sets a high standard with Landmark project

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SPECIAL TO THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

If Greenwood Village, Cherry Creek and Cherry Hills Village were competitive rich kids, one of them would be absolutely green with envy right now. It wouldn't be Greenwood Village, which has rolled out the red carpet for upstart developer Zack Davidson.

"Zack has so much energy and enthusiasm for what he does," said Greenwood Village Mayor Nancy Sharpe of the man who has suddenly turned up the volume on upscale development in the metro area.

His \$160 million, 1-million-square-foot retail center and high-rise residential development —



dubbed The Landmark — will not only change the skyline of the Denver Tech Center, but may change the collective consciousness of Denver's upper crust.

"We wanted to raise the bar so high that no one could touch us," said Davidson, president of Everest Development Co., a new player on the Denver development scene.

Not that Davidson looks like a "player," dressed in a casual, short-sleeve, blue-plaid shirt, his wire-rimmed glasses and boyish grin presenting the persona of a neophyte English professor more than a seasoned real estate baron. Don't let that Southern twang fool you, either.

Davidson, 38, honed his investment skills on

Wall Street and built one of the most coveted urban condominium projects in San Francisco, One Embarcadero South. Completed in early 2002 adjacent to PacBell Park and South Beach Marina, the project was named the Top Condominium Community in the country by the National Association of Home Builders.

Though eager to follow up that project with something equally challenging, Davidson stepped back and methodically assessed his options, refusing to feel pressured to jump back into the fray. It was the kind of discipline he'd learn on the streets and in the boardrooms of Manhattan.

"There was a two- to three-year gap when I looked at hundreds of properties, but I chose not to pull the trigger," he said.

Davidson kept a close eye on several metropolitan markets. "I'm always looking for supply-and-demand imbalances," he said. Then a Denver broker tipped him off to a prime piece of real estate: the former Stone & Webster building in Greenwood Village. Located between Bellevue Avenue and Orchard Road, the 15-acre site had generated interest but little action.

"Two other people had it under contract before me, but they passed on it," Davidson said. Though the property had great visibility from Interstate 25 and sat alongside the new light-rail line, it was hard to find from side streets. Besides, it was ugly.

"Everyone else saw a nasty office building. I saw the Princess Bride," Davidson opines.

Not that his rose-colored assessment would make for an easy date. Some 40 potential suitors showed up when Trammell Crow Co. put the property on the bidding block in late 2004. Five handsome faces made the cut, including Davidson who said he won the maiden's hand based on his final answer: \$5.5 million cash. No strings attached. Closing in 15 days.

There would be no time for a honeymoon. Davidson now needed to woo Greenwood Village officials with his ambitious plan for a high-end mixed-use development. Never mind that there was no precedent for this kind of project in the whole metro area. Who is this guy, anyway?

Sharpe remembers her first meeting with Davidson and was smitten immediately by his thorough and warm-natured approach.

"When we first met with Zack, he'd already reviewed the city's comprehensive plan," Sharpe recalled. "I don't know many developers who study a city's comprehensive plan."

Davidson's ambitious plans came as a complete surprise.

"I was pretty certain that any [significant] development would occur around the Arapahoe Station. I was completely wrong," Sharpe said.

Blissfully wrong.

Within two years, the site will be home to two luxury residential towers, high-end retail stores, entertainment venues and an 1,100-space multi-level public parking structure.

April 2007 is the projected opening date for the commercial component that will include an HW Home store, a gourmet market, boutique clothing shops, restaurants and a second Denver-area Comedy Works. Mark Cuban, the brash owner of the Dallas Mavericks and the Landmark Theater chain, has signed on to develop a 30,000-square-foot prototype complex that will primarily feature first-run independent movies.

"My tenants are the best in every category," Davidson said.

But the real star of this show is the residential development: some 250 units in two towers ranging in price from \$500,000 to \$1.5 million. The smallest condo is just under 1,300 square feet. Penthouses are between 2,500 and 3,700 square feet.

Choice is the operative word with 39 floor plans to choose from.

Even then, said project architect Chad Cox, "We don't say 'no.' If a client wants to knock down walls and create his own custom design, that's OK."

Cox, who helped Davidson with everything from the overall site plan to the smallest design details, said the most important single issue was ensuring that almost every unit has oversized terraces with breathtaking mountain views.

While the view is the main thing, it's not the only thing. There would be no compromise on the quality of materials: granite, wood, glass and steel. To give potential buyers a taste of the good life awaiting them, Davidson built a \$2 million sales center configured like one of the units and constructed with all of the material options. That way shoppers can actually see what the onyx backsplash or the hand-scraped wood floor looks like.

"I guarantee no one's ever done that in Denver," Davidson said.

Not that he really needed a pushy approach. On the first day of sales last November, 106 of 122 units in the first tower were snared within eight hours. It's sold out. Some 300 people are on a waiting list for Tower Two.

"A lot of high net-worth people have moved to Denver," said Davidson. Many local developers, he said, simply underestimated the demand for swanky high-rise living that includes over-the-top amenities usually reserved for five-star resorts.

"These people want that in a permanent lifestyle," he said.

What can buyers expect when units are completed in late 2007? Room service 24/7, valet



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Zack Davidson is president of Everest Development, developer of the Landmark.

parking, a catering and demonstration kitchen, furnished condos that can be reserved for guests, outdoor pools with lavish landscaping, fire pits and water features, a private theater and library, a wine cellar, doggy daycare services and probably some things that even Paris Hilton hasn't thought of yet.

Rike Palese, one of the exclusive brokers on the project, has sold hundreds of high-end residential properties during his career, but nothing on par with the Landmark. It's something many clients have asked for.

"Their kids have gone off to college and they're sitting in these huge homes," said Palese. "They kept asking, 'Where can we downsize to?'"

Few were interested in moving downtown to chi-chi high-rise projects in LoDo and the Golden Triangle. Too much noise. Too many traffic and parking woes.

Enter Davidson.

"He's a real visionary. He gets it. He saw the need," Palese said.

He was also willing to lose his shirt, if his instincts were wrong.

"I'm no Houdini. I had to be willing to take an extreme risk before anything happened and be willing to lose \$10 to \$15 million," Davidson said.

Now that the project is the envy of other developers, the risks don't appear so formidable. Elite buyers have embraced the project with open checkbooks.

"It'll be like the finest resort in the world, but the sheets belong to you," Davidson said.

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