

**MIDTOWN RALEIGH NEWS** JUNE 20, 2013

# Wiggins: North Hills residents welcome Tower Two news

**HIGHLIGHTS**

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BY LORI D.R. WIGGINS

It's as if Ken Bunn was waiting for me to call.

Having heard he'd recently moved to North Hills, Bunn landed on my list of folks to chat with after Kane Realty announced plans Wednesday to develop North Hills Tower Two, adding to the Midtown district's mix of places to live, work, shop, dine and play.

"I am a big supporter of the development here," said Bunn, 46. "The traffic makes me a little nervous. It gets a bit congested, but with the walkability and the different options we have here, we can get just about anything we want and we don't ever have to go far."

At 18 stories high and 300,000 square feet, Tower Two, designed as the tallest on the I-440 Beltline, will be the newest commercial and residential addition to North Hills. With construction set for December, Tower Two is expected to open adjacent to the Captrust Tower in 2015. There will be 10 stories of office space with seven below for parking, retail stores and restaurants. Already under construction by Kane in North Hills are 650 residences, the Midtown Park and the Hyatt House hotel set to open soon.

It takes me back to the scrutiny-filled thrill a decade ago in Columbia, S.C., over developer Alan Kahn's plans to construct a lifestyle center complete with places to shop, dine, work, live and play. I couldn't wait to do the reporting, but I returned to North Carolina before ground-breaking and had to follow the news from afar. Kahn's Village at Sandhill opened in 2004. But the seasoned shopping center developer struggled to recover from the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression and fought foreclosure of the signature project. He filed for bankruptcy protection in April and faced creditors in court earlier this month.

So, the survival and growth evident in Midtown is good news, with apparently good vibes from residents and businesses alike. It's an environment Bunn longed to relive. He'd lived in the North Hills area right out of college, then moved to Columbus, Ohio, where he lived nearly a decade. He returned to North Carolina in 2007 and settled in Cary, then a magnet for young professionals. A year ago, he decided to move. Six months ago, Bunn found a home in North Hills, where he has noticed the market has seemed to rebound faster and expects property values to get a boost. "I realized I missed this sort of urban feel," he said. "This was a fantastic compromise."

Every Saturday morning, Bunn walks to the Farmer's Market. On Sundays, he takes the 5-10-minute stroll to find a spot to read and enjoy coffee. "We walk constantly," Bunn said. "That's the main thing I enjoy, and adding more retail is great for somebody like me. It's never an event for us to get everybody in the car and go somewhere. We just walk across the street and we're there. "I'm looking forward to more of that."

Like Bunn and me, Chris Angel, a managing partner of Sparians, and his partner are Raleigh natives. So is Alex Ortiz, the general manager of World of Beer, located in the Captrust Tower. Each of us has witnessed the transformation of North Hills, which opened in 1967 as the first enclosed mall in Raleigh and the first two-story, air-conditioned mall between D.C. and Atlanta.

Before settling on North Hills, Angel said, the search for a place extended across Raleigh and Wake County. But after one conversation with Kane, the Sparians partners knew they'd found the greatest opportunity for growth. "We knew the potential that's now starting to come to fruition on this side of the street," said Angel, who lives in the apartments above Sparians, his upscale bowling and entertainment center. "The list of companies here already is a Who's Who list of companies in the area."

Of course, the economic downturn has meant "it's taken some time," Angel said. "But we know the ultimate end result is going to be good for us. "I understand what Kane is trying to develop here with live, work, play," Angel said. "It's a phenomenal concept, having so much in one location."

"It fits our model well." Ortiz, a Millbrook High School graduate who started working at World of Beer in Florida, said just as he's seen his brand grow from 1 to 41 stores, he's watched "North Hills transcend to this wonderful area to be around. "It definitely symbolizes that Raleigh is moving in a progressive direction," he said, adding he expects it won't be tough to fill North Hills Tower Two. "It makes North Hills a destination. That's exactly what we want."

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