

# Design

by Diane Lea

## Crabtree Promenade and North Hills projects transform and revitalize INNOVATIVE DESIGN WITH PEOPLE IN MIND

**T**he transformation of Raleigh from a small, compact city to a sprawling metropolis characterized by residential development, regional shopping malls and office complexes occurred during a relatively brief period in the last quarter of the 20th century. Now, in the early years of the 21st century, two Raleigh-based developers are working to internalize that pattern by creating places that reclaim a sense of intimate scale. These places would integrate work space and living space, as well as provide an opportunity for people to park their cars and stroll comfortably and safely to dozens of retail, dining and entertainment choices. If that description reminds you a little of the hometown you grew up in, it is meant to. It is also a succinct definition of the tenets of the concept known as the “new urbanism,” or mixed-use development, popularized by visionary planners and designers.

For successful developers John Kane, who grew up in Henderson, and Mark Tipton, a native of Greenville, their current development projects are their first experiences with the widely praised mixed-use community.

Kane’s company, Kane Realty Corporation, is involved in the \$200 million redevelopment of Raleigh’s venerable North Hills Shopping Center, opened in 1964 as the first two-level enclosed mall between Washington, D.C. and

Atlanta. Kane’s company also recently completed the retrofit of The Lassiter at North Hills, converting an aging 14-acre strip shopping plaza to an up-scale shopping and dining emporium cited by the *News and Observer* as “Raleigh’s Madison Avenue.” The current Lassiter will be joined by two residential projects. The Alexan at North Hills will be developed by Trammel Crowe Residential and an eight-story luxury condominium building will be developed by Kane. When the two sites are combined to become North Hills, it will be a unified 45-acre site formatted for a total of 930,000 square feet of retail and entertainment space, 300,000 square feet of office space, 150 key hotel rooms, 375 residential units, 60,000 square feet of retail and 300 condominiums. There will even be a fitness and wellness center and a branch of the public library.

Tipton, president of Crabtree Avenue Investment Group, was lured out of a two-year early retirement by the prospect of working with another aging shopping location in a premier setting across Crabtree Creek adjacent to Crabtree Valley Mall. He and his locally-based development team are engaged in constructing *The Promenade at Crabtree*, a unique multi-use community on approximately 12 acres that will accommodate 250,000 square feet of retail space, up to 150,000 square feet of

office space, and 600 condos ranging in price from \$260,000 to \$1 million.

Kane’s solo career dates back to 1978 with a Greenville shopping center. His experience continued to be focused largely on shopping center development, with some office leasing and hotel construction. Kane admits that he was intrigued by the idea of doing something totally different with the prominent North Hills site when he acquired the declining retail property. “Mixed-use is a trend around the country,” says Kane. “It is being well-received in major markets, and I realized it would suit the North Hills in-fill site.” By that time, Kane had already purchased the adjoining Lassiter site and sought planning and design advice for the total acquisition. After a national search, Kane Corporation chose Baltimore-based Carter-Burgess Inc. to do a master plan of what architect John Larsen, an associate principal in Carter-Burgess, calls a self-sufficient district within Raleigh with restaurants and retail shops oriented around a town square and streets with shops.

That Carter-Burgess was up to the task is evident in the eight-foot-square model of the entire 45-acre North Hills development. Occupying much of a corner





room in Kane's BTI Building offices, the model exhibits a skillful integration of existing buildings (both long-time anchor JC Penney and a major parking deck remain), and new construction which accommodates a 30-foot fall in grade from North Hill's main entrance to the rear of the site. The model displays the new North Hills as its creators envision it: an urban design extension of midtown Raleigh rather than merely an independent retail destination. It is designed to be a pleasant, fun place to spend a lazy morning, an afternoon, a family night out, or to run in for errands—all in a beautifully landscaped area that's friendly to walkers and motorists.

Kane's Director of Finance and Development, Mike Smith, points out some of the extraordinary features Carter-Burgess incorporated into the plan, including placing the 14-screen Marquee Cinema

on top of the Target store. Smith notes that Jack Hollon, who heads Carter-Burgess' North Hills team, worked with Target to adapt their 130,000-square-foot requirement into a portion of the existing mall footprint. The blending of Target, JC Penny, local retailers, national stores, the cinema and restaurants along with the upscale shops at The Lassiter will create a retail and entertainment dynamic that connects multiple generations and incomes. The remainder of the original mall's lower level was converted to two levels of underground parking in the heart of the project. There is also angled parking on the streets.

Essential to Kane's vision of the Master Plan is to link the already thriving shops of The Lassiter with the new North Hills by aligning entries and developing pedestrian access ways across tree-lined streets. "We

are really proud of the tenants we were able to attract to The Lassiter," continues Smith. "We have the first Yves Delorme store in the area. Our local architect, Davenport and Associates, worked with the designer from their Charlottesville, Virginia, headquarters to achieve the up-fit for the store's interior." The roster of The Lassiter's retail tenants is long and distinguished, including George O'Neill Antiques, Tyler House, Beanie + Cecil, Shop 20-12, LUXE, Ivy Cottage, Plush, Edith Medlin Fine Antiques, Elaine Miller Collection, Learning Express, Mephisto, Quintessentials and a boutique-scale Harris Teeter. A sheltering overhang creates a continuous porch around The Lassiter, and the diverse restaurants offer attractive wrought-iron tables and chairs for outdoor dining. Each shop has distinctive exterior features as well as individualized interior design. Starbucks Coffee, for example, defines its visible corner space with a clever rotunda entrance characterized by a blue dome, squared pillars and handsome copper awnings.

#### TIPTON TEAMWORK TACKLES MIXED-USE

Mark Tipton's career experience includes a term as president of both the North Carolina Home Builders Association, and later, the National Association of Home Builders. He has enjoyed enviable success with residential projects, shopping centers and office and retail leasing. He admits he had to be drawn kicking and screaming into the new world of mixed-use development. "Another Raleigh developer, Bill Jackson, brought the idea for *The*



*Promenade* to me," says Tipton. "He kept describing the opportunity for people to live and work there and have all the services and retail they would need for everyday living. I knew it was a perfect location for anything and finally the idea clicked."

Tipton's first task was to re-assemble his development team, a group that has been working together for over 25 years, many of whom have known each other since their undergraduate days at East Carolina University. Tipton started the Crabtree Promenade project with the Greenville civil engineering firm of Rivers and Associates, headed by Donnie Brewster and represented locally by Kirk Rightmyer. He also brought in nationally and internationally recognized landscape architect Tim Newell and two long-time associates, builder Mason Williams and Raleigh-based architect Kenn Boisseau.

A key member of the team is Frank Lloyd Wright disciple, artist-architect and honorary Eastern North Carolinian, Bennett Strahan. Tipton characterizes Strahan as the man who can listen to what everyone says and then render it on paper. When Tipton called Strahan at his home

in Cimarron, New Mexico, he initially asked him to come down and talk about some art for Tipton's new Raleigh residence. Fortunately, Strahan was on his way to a family wedding in North Carolina's Outer Banks and agreed to drop by. "I started talking to him about this project and showed him the site," says Tipton. "When he started saying 'We could do it this way,' I knew I had him."


Tipton brought in other resource people to assist with what became a major rezoning and development effort. They included Harold Liles of Central Carolina Bank, who along with Dickinson, Logan, Todd & Barber Inc., has assisted in providing financing for the project. Larkin Pahl, of Whistler Investment Group LLC, is another Tipton team stalwart.

Planning the conversion of what was known as the Kidd's Hill site to a sophisticated mixed-use community was complicated in every aspect. The setting was



Southeast view of *The Promenade*

confined, the grade was steep. There were traffic considerations from both the major regional shopping center and the Raleigh Beltline, and the property adjoins a significant portion of the Raleigh greenway system running along Crabtree Creek. Tipton's team's vision was so complete that they utilized the natural elements to their advantage to reduce traffic and encourage a pedestrian atmosphere around the promenade. To accomplish this, the team worked with the site by building vertically in order to provide easy pedestrian access



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to both the greenway and to Crabtree Valley Mall. Strahan has conceptualized outdoor niches suitable for artists and vendors, which will be part of the lower level of the complex. "The site has location, location, location," says Tipton. "It is easily accessible, and *The Promenade* is to be a complete destination, a self-sustaining community."

Tipton describes the life-style of *The Promenade* like this. "If you come home from work and you've forgotten to pick up the milk, the bread and the fish for dinner, you can walk to the neighborhood market without getting in your car. If you're really beat, you can put in your order via email, fax or telephone, and the store will deliver it to you. On the other hand, you can choose to dine at one of several neighborhood restaurants or have prepared food brought in."

Tipton's team turned for guidance to the City's Small Area Plan designed by Raleigh Planning Director George Chapman's staff. "George's people had put a lot of thought into what should be there," says Tipton. "The Plan made sense to us because it allowed enough flexibility for a

developer to be creative and to make it his or her own." What emerged was a remarkable cooperative effort between members of the development community and the City planning staff. Strahan notes that the synergy surrounding the planning and rezoning process for *The Promenade* was enormous, a statement verified by the fact that the entire process was accomplished in less than a year.

The focus of *The Promenade* at Crabtree is, in fact, the promenade itself, a large, dramatic urban space devoted to pedestrians. It is the length of two football fields with a tall clock at the northern terminus. All the shops and upper level residential areas open onto the promenade. There is secure covered parking for each residential unit and separate parking for offices located beneath. In the Tipton team's concept plan, landscape architect Tim Newell's computer-generated graphics depict the details of *The Promenade* down to the color and texture of the brick of the buildings, the copper-toned street lights, and the raised-bed planters and curved iron street furniture.

Complementing Newell's colorful graphics are Strahan's painstakingly detailed

elevations of each building's individual façade, which allows each retailer an individual look. A strong believer in adhering to regional precedents, Strahan has adapted architectural styles from different periods to the storefronts facing the captivating promenade. There are elements derived from North Carolina's small town commercial areas, from Raleigh's own historic buildings like the Sir Walter Raleigh Hotel, and from selected elements from favorite buildings such as Wright Auditorium on the campus of East Carolina University. They blend easily with the more unified look of the building's upper stories.

It's tempting to use words like "rebirth" and "re-invention" to describe the new North Hills and *The Promenade* at Crabtree. After all, the sites of two of Raleigh's most familiar retail developments are being reborn and enhanced.

But, in fact, the revitalized North Hills and *The Promenade* are distinguished by their very newness. The fresh, innovative design and commitment to a quality of life brings a 21st-century character to two of the city's important residential and commercial quarters. **MM**



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