



Near North neighborhood has room for expansion

BY LARRY FINLEY
Real Estate Reporter

The time is right for Streeter-ville.

A dozen or more new condominium high-rises are under way or will begin next year, adding about 3,500 moderate- to high-priced residences to the market there, according to Gail Lissner, vice president of Appraisal Research Counselors Ltd.

Streeterville has a lot to offer — large pieces of land close to Michigan Avenue and surrounded by Lake Michigan and the Chicago River. It's got shops, restaurants, theaters, museums, beaches and even a Ferris wheel. So why now?

"It's been overlooked, and suddenly it's all coming together," she said. "There hasn't been a lot of development there in the last 15 years. And now it just so happens that it is all being clustered in one year. Michigan Avenue has become increasingly desirable as a place to be near. What better place to be than Streeterville?"

Building might have been put off there because some developers were uncertain of the market and how many new condominiums Downtown could handle, she said.

"I think that the sites were big, and early in this market developers were looking for smaller projects," she said. "Developers were concerned about absorption and most of the projects were smaller."

The area will have a sufficient variety of units and prices to attract more of the "middle market" than the nearby Gold Coast, on the other side of Michigan Avenue, she said.

"The buyer profile continues to be a mix, which is what gives strength to the market," Lissner said. "It's people who are coming back from the suburbs, whether for permanent or part-time residency. It's trade-up buyers. It's first-time buyers. And there is speculation going on. We also are seeing a lot more people from out of town coming in and keeping part-time homes here."

The Northwestern University and hospital complex at the north end of Streeterville has brought a steady market of staff, students and interns, she said.

"There are many more sites left," she said. "It's been reported the CBS-TV site (630 N. McClurg Court) will be redeveloped. LR Development has another site they haven't developed yet at Lake Shore Drive and Grand. There are a number of sites throughout the area that are potentials. But we don't see them happening this year."

The proposed 115-story Fordham Spire, at Lake Shore Drive and the north bank of the Chicago River, should not have an impact



The Fairbanks, one of Streeterville's new condominium high-rise, will have expansive views of the Chicago lakefront.

on the market any time soon, she said. The builder, Fordham Co., must get city approval and then it would take several years to build, she said.

But projects such as Centrum Properties' 3-tower CityFront Plaza "can bring up the number of condominiums in Streeterville pretty fast," Lissner said.

Centrum partner John McLinden said the first building, the Fairbanks, will have 281 condominiums out of the total 900 expected for the entire trio of towers. The site is the entire block bounded by St. Clair Street, Illinois Street, Columbus Drive and Grand Avenue, he said.

"The time for the neighborhood finally came, and a lot of people were thinking the same thing," he said. "A lot of the projects over there are big projects because the city zoning allows it. It's not like building just a few town homes."

Early preconstruction sales have been strong, he said, and include a

high number of suburbanites buying a city place, and empty nesters who own second homes outside of the area.

"Even though there are a lot of sales going on over there, everyone seems to be doing well," he said.

Fairbanks prices begin in the mid \$300,000s for a 1-bedroom to more than \$2 million for the largest penthouse. Sizes range from about 875 to 1,920 square feet.

Standards include floor-to-ceiling windows, kitchens with granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, marble-tiled master baths, recessed lighting fixtures and a pre-wired media center.

The building will have 24-hour doormen, concierge services, indoor parking, outdoor pool, fitness center, steam room, locker rooms, clubroom, business center, theater, media room and bar area, as well



The Fairbanks will feature the premium finishes and appliances that the upscale buyers in Streeterville are demanding in new housing.

OPEN HOUSE

Ex-renters did their homework in Aurora

BY BILL CUNIFF
Real Estate Reporter



Rhonda Lorenz and Tony Pignato

Tony Pignato and Rhonda Lorenz grew up a half block away from one another in a west suburb, but they never knew one another — until two years ago. Tony and Rhonda, renters throughout their adult lives, are buying their first home — at Stonegate West, an age-targeted development in Aurora.

"We decided that one of our goals was to purchase a home," Rhonda said. "We looked around, but we really hadn't found anything suitable. We drove by a sign for Stonegate West quite by accident. We stopped in at the sales center — which at that time stood all by itself in an empty field.

"We wanted a good investment as well as a great place to live,"

she said. "Friends advised us that purchasing at the very beginning of a development is a great way to obtain maximum appreciation."

Tony and Rhonda have careers that take them to a variety of work destinations. "We wanted to have easy access to I-88 as well as a commuter train station," Tony said. "We are close to two commuter train stations, the one on Route 59 and the other in downtown Aurora. We also are convenient to I-88 at the Farnsworth interchange."

Tony and Rhonda were novice home buyers, but they did their detective work like experts. They inspected Woodland Lakes in Aurora, a two-year-old development by the same builder, Kensington Homes.

"We visited with some residents who had already made friends

with their neighbors. They reported to us that all of them were very pleased with Kensington Homes," Tony said. "They told us that their homes were delivered on time and in good condition. We also observed how attractive Woodland Lakes is, and the large size of the trees and plantings."

"At the beginning, it seemed a bit scary to us purchasing without walking through a model home. But we rapidly became comfortable with our decision," he said.

Tony and Rhonda selected the 1,990-square-foot Cortland floor plan. It has 2 bedrooms, 2 baths and a 2-car attached garage. Amenities include a loft, a great room, a dining room, a deck, a pantry, a laundry room and a master-bedroom suite with a walk-in closet.

"We initially found the variety

of choices difficult to grasp," Rhonda said. "However, the Design Studio staff was excellent. We feel like we made good selections — vaulted ceilings for the master bedroom and living area, can lighting, a gas line for a grill and a modified master bath. We eliminated the tub and replaced it with an extra-large shower with a seat."

Rhonda and Tony are also impressed with the social aspects at Stonegate West. "We like the activities, such as cooking classes that will take place at the clubhouse," Rhonda said. "We like the idea of the fitness center so close to home. The clubhouse will be a lot of fun and a good way to meet the neighbors."

Rhonda and Tony had to ask a

INSIDE



AROUND THE HOUSE

Throw away those baggies! Use Neat Nets to store children's small toys.

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STREET

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Growth of business has added allure

as beautifully landscaped gardens, McLinden said.

Construction is scheduled to begin by the end of the year, with the first deliveries in 2007, he said. The sales center is at 240 E. Illinois, (312) 923-9990, or visit www.CityFrontPiazza.com.

The @properties real estate company has had so much business in the Streeterville and Gold Coast areas that it will open an office there, at 212 E. Ohio, later this year, according to co-founder Thaddeus Wong.

"The number of people we have who are looking for housing is astronomical, especially new construction," he said.

The initial spurt of residential housing in the 1990s caused a growth in restaurants, businesses and other services, which made the current growth more attractive, he said.

"You have a movie theater," he said. "You have a Dominick's [Finer Foods] opening. You have Fox & Obel [food market]. You have the retail and commercial that it was lacking. At the same time, it borders Michigan Avenue. You walk directly west and you are at Nordstrom's. Walk to the east, you are at the beach and Navy Pier."

Favorable zoning for larger buildings has made construction more profitable there, he said.

"Streeterville still has many spots available for construction," he said. "The density allows for a much larger number of units, which allows for 1 bedrooms and 2 bedrooms. That is more affordable to more people. It's still expensive, but it is more affordable. The Gold Coast has been heavily developed for a century. So, the opportunities for new housing are scarce. Most of the new housing that is going up is high end. It's exclusive."

The people who are buying in Streeterville want "luxuries and amenities" for their money, Wong said. They want 9- or 10-foot ceilings, a concierge service, 24-hour doorman and a party room, he said.

"All of the buyers are purchasing a parking space," he said "If they don't have a car, they still purchase a parking space, because everybody knows Chicago is still a driving city. When you have a condominium without parking it is in much less demand at resale than that same condominium with parking."

"A number of parents are buying homes for their kids, whether they are students or graduates from college," Wong said. "With the real estate appreciation that everyone has experienced, they all want to be owners rather than renters."

The @properties information number is (312) 254-0200 or www.atproperties.com.

The recently announced 550 St. Clair sold 59 of its 112 condominiums the first weekend it opened and is now close to 70 percent sold, according to Mark Sutherland, principal of Sutherland Pearsall, the developer.

"It hasn't been one particular type of unit, either," he said. "It's been across the board from our studies to the 1-, 2- and 3-bedrooms to the penthouses."

All sizes are available, he said, from the studios, starting at \$270,000 to the penthouses from \$1.1 million and \$1.6 million.

A buyer survey found that 20 percent are from out-of-state, 25



The 550 St. Clair building is drawing suburbanites, out-of-towners and Chicagoans to its convenient address.

percent are from the suburbs and the rest from the city, he said.

"Quite a few have homes in Florida and are buying these as a summer home to get away from the south," Sutherland added.

Interiors and appliances will all be premium quality, he said, including granite countertops, marble or slate floors and stainless-steel appliances.

Other amenities include floor-to-ceiling windows, 10-foot to 11-foot ceilings, Brazilian cherry or maple flooring, solid core doors and wiring for telephone, satellite TV and high-speed Internet.

Part of the early sales success, he said, has been because of the response to the sales center at 201 E. Ohio, which includes two fully decorated models — a studio and a 3-bedroom, with lighted city panoramas as a backdrop.

Call (312) 222-0550 or visit www.550StClair.com.

To the east, 600 N. Fairbanks will be a 41-story high-rise with 224 condominiums designed by the internationally known architect Helmut Jahn for Urban R2 Development LLC.

Jahn said he would bring European influences to the building design. It is Jahn's first project in the downtown area since his 120 N. La Salle office building was completed in 1991.

"Europe has encouraged innovation in technology and materials," Jahn said. "The expectations for living accommodations are higher in Europe in such areas as fresh air, light and visual privacy."

Prices will start at \$330,000 for a 1-bedroom unit with 850 to 925 square feet of space and 1½ baths. The largest offerings are the 3-bedroom penthouses on the four top floors, which have 3,000 square feet and 12- to 14-foot ceilings. Prices range from \$1.6 million to \$1.9 million.

Company President Gary Rosenberg said that "to meet the desires of a market looking for high-quality living, we created, as our standard, what is offered as upgrades for others."

This includes premium appliances, hardwood flooring, exposed concrete walls and ceilings, individual heating and cooling, solid



The 550 St. Clair building uses models units such as this one in their sales campaign for their units, which will feature 1-, 2- and 3-bedrooms, plus penthouses.



The realistic 550 S. Clair models use photographic displays to show what the views will be like from the finished product.

core doors, chrome plumbing and hardware fixtures and floor-to-ceiling windows.

All units will have inset balconies, he said, "which is a nice feature because it provides a semi-protected area. In many locations, it gets windy and people don't get to use them as much as they expected."

Building amenities will include a glass lobby, conference/media room, green-roof terrace, fitness center, lap pool, sun-deck, home theater, business facilities, 24-hour doorman and two dog runs on the 13th floor. Eleven floors of the high-rise will be designated for parking and mechanicals, he added. For more information, call Koenig & Strey at (312) 951-0807.

Some of the last pieces of Streeterville's lakefront will be filled by 600 N. Lake Shore Drive, a two-building set of high-rises being built by the Belgravia Group and Sandz Development, which also built 530 N. Lake Shore.

There will be a total of about 400 units in a 40-story tower and a 46-story companion. Prices start in

the high \$300,000s for a 1-bedroom unit with about 1,000 square feet and 1½ baths. There are also 2- and 3-bedroom units with 2 to 3½ baths.

The north building is being constructed first, and will be about 60 feet from the south tower to help improve the views. The buildings will be set back on their sites to help reduce shadows on the nearby beach.

Standard features include: stainless steel appliances, granite

countertops, marble master baths, separate tubs and showers, laundry appliances, oak flooring or carpeting, walk-in closets, balconies and individual heating and cooling.

The building features a rooftop sun-deck and garden, fitness center, community rooms with kitchens, dry cleaners, individual storage, bicycle room, indoor parking, 24-hour doorman and concierge services. For more information, call (312) 832-0060.

MCL Companies continues to grow its big River East neighborhood with three sections and room for two more on the south end of Streeterville.

The 47-story ParkView condominium, at McClurg and Illinois, has 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom units starting at \$425,900. They feature hardwood floors, walk-in closets, granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, contemporary baths, whirlpool tubs and private balconies.

The building includes indoor parking, fitness center, outdoor pool, theater room, entertainment suites, individual storage, bicycle room, dry cleaners, 24-hour doorman and on-site management. Call (312) 838-4200 or visit www.mclcompanies.com.

At 150 E. Ontario, a 51-story condominium building is planned for the current properties at 148-152 E. Ontario, just east of Michigan Avenue.

The 160-unit development will feature retail space on the first three levels, as well as parking for 180 cars, according to Monaco Development, now waiting for final approval from the city.

At 222 E. Pearson, Vilas Development Corp. recently purchased a 213-unit apartment building and is planning to convert it to condominiums this autumn. The high-rise building was built in 1983. For more information, call (630) 986-2434.



The RiverView Townhouses and Condominiums of River East occupy a choice location on the Chicago River at the south end of Streeterville. MCL Companies has room for two more developments.



The 600 N. Fairbanks building will be 41 stories of glass and steel designed by architect Helmut Jahn.