

Pride in the Plaza

by Linda F. Jarrett

Standing atop the 16-story tower of the new Plaza in Clayton office building, the first thing that comes to mind is how green St. Louis looks from this vantage point. At the "topping off" ceremony held June 15, principals in the project, guests and the media were hoisted to the top via a construction elevator to enjoy wine and hors d'oeuvres while congratulatory toasts were made. As workers laid the final beam in place, Bob Clark, president of Clayco Construction Company, thanked all those involved in the development and, with only a little exaggeration, expressed his pride with the outcome. "The placing of this last structural beam is a milestone marking the final months of construction on the largest office building to be built in Clayton in more than a decade," he said. "Despite the coldest winter in the past 100 years and a nine-week strike by area concrete drivers, we are on target to deliver this building and the entire project on schedule in a very aggressive timeframe."

Clayco, known nationally for its design/build construction, broke ground in February 2000 and the first tenants of the office building are due to move in this October, a fast 18 months after the start date. The residential tower will be ready for occupancy in March 2002. Developed by The Carondelet Development LLC, headed by Michael Staenberg and Stan Kroenke, the complex stands on the southeastern corner of Hanley Road and Carondelet Boulevard, west of the Ritz Carlton Hotel. All involved should be proud. The 341,000 square foot Plaza office building is part of a \$145 million mixed use project that, upon completion, will include a 30-story, 387,000 square foot residential building and a combination of restaurant and retail shops for a total of 1.2 million square feet. The distinctive Neo-Classical structure includes red brick, glass fiber reinforced concrete and architectural windows. Other features include a two-acre amenity deck. The distinctive Neo-Classical structure includes red brick, glass fiber reinforced concrete and architectural windows. with a swimming pool, and a half-acre dog walking area; and a 19,000-square-foot parking structure with parking for 1,271 vehicles.

Most of those interviewed for this story agreed that this project was the most challenging they had attempted, if for no other reason than its sheer magnitude. Clayco Project Manager Kirk different things, or the owner is looking for improvements or better ways to do things he hasn't thought of before." He leaned back in his chair and smiled. "This will be the nicest building in Clayton and we're ready to do another!" Greg Frigerio, vice-president of the Clayco Tilt-Up Division, commanded the concrete work. Speaking about the challenges of the project, he said, "the sheer volume of 55,000 yards of concrete was a structural challenge in itself. "We chose concrete because of the building heights and the tenants needed a certain clear height for office space. With steel we would have had to increase the office height of the exterior skin because beams would have gotten deeper due to floor loads. A concrete floor will give a thinner floor." When using all that concrete, its crucial that the supply be there on time. A nine-week concrete strike last year threatened to put a large-size kink in the time schedule. Frigerio said, "We made slow progress during the nine weeks and we only managed to pour a couple of floors. Normally, we were turning a floor every nine days. With the strike, that time doubled because we just weren't able to get the concrete in a timely fashion. But we did not come to a complete stop." The unusual (some would say normal) cold weather in December created major difficulties in pouring the concrete, which had to be heated. Frigerio said that keeping the concrete warm enough to cure during several days of below freezing temperatures presented a special challenge. "We ran a field line of the main gas service up through the elevator core with tees and ran branch lines off that on each floor where we needed the temporary heat. We serviced those with a million BTU temporary natural gas fire heaters. One time we had 18 on the job and it took about six heaters per floor, and we had to maintain the heat on the previous floor so we could get the right cure for the concrete." Frigerio explained that for concrete to cure properly, it can't freeze. "If it gets cold, it takes longer to harden. The longer it takes to harden, the longer you have to leave the work form in place, so it was critical that we kept the concrete temperature above 70 degrees." They also wrapped the floors being poured with tarps to help keep the heat inside. The intense cold took its toll on workers too. They sometimes had to wear five layers of clothing. When that happens, "You don't get the productivity you would normally get under normal temperatures," Fejario said. Frigerio said another surprise was an underground coal mine that was not detected at first. "Although it was small and very shallow, we had to investigate it and decide what to do, then we finally grouted it full." Strikes, intense cold, mines what other obstacles did the Clayco crew face? How about working in a tight site with traffic and pedestrians passing within a few feet of a massive construction project? "It was pretty hard," said Warden, "although we were fortunate to get control of the site next door for our trailers and parking."

Clayco Safety Director Jerry Fleming had a bit more to say. "We had three large tower cranes typically used for high rises, and having those operate on this tight site without them running into each other required having very good communications with parties involved." Fleming said special training sessions were held with operators so that not only would each crane operator knew what the others Warden said this was the biggest and most challenging project he had ever managed. "This has been a really fast-paced difficult project. The owner has created lots of challenges for us as far as leaving him flexibility, but always thinking about what we're doing and changing what we're doing for the better. The design/build process on a project like this is difficult." Warden likened the design/build process to "a tornado on its side with the project beginning at the wide circle. The tornado keeps spinning until it gets to the bottom where its small. In the plan/spec methodology, when you finish the design tornado, you put out a set of documents and bid it to four or five contractors, they build it and they know what they're going to build.

"In the design/build process, the first few circles are design circles, and all the rest of the circles to the end are design and construction, so when you get to the bottom, the building is built and people are moving into it." He said that even though they are only three months away from moving the first tenants in the office and garage building, "We're still grappling with design changes. Some are tenants who want to do were doing at all times, but that those on the ground would be aware of the loads. "Typically we do a lot of preplanning when we're in the design phase of a project [with] project managers, engineers, [and] the whole design team, because safety is an important issue and stressed throughout that process," he said. "A high rise building is different than doing a tilt-up box so it has some unique safety requirements. This is especially so because we're building two towers simultaneously.

"We have everyone tied off and we have nets, not only to catch people, but to catch debris. A brick falling from one story will hurt, but from 10 stories, it will kill." Fortunately, to date, the project has not had any serious injuries. Fleming said he thought their Safety Incentive Program has helped in that regard. "We gave away a big screen television and several other nice items to subcontractors and employees. It builds up morale. Safety is based upon team work, attitude and behavior on the part of each individual." Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart & Associates (SRSS), Atlanta, Ga., are lead architects for the development and viewed the tight quarters as not so much a problem as a challenge. Chuck Hull, SRSS associate and project manager, said, "I think it helps the project because that kind of density creates the kind of urban character that our client was trying to create here. "Instead of a typical development with one building and parking lot on one block, then another building and parking lot on another block, we were trying to create a higher density urban environment with a lot of street activity." He said the selection of brick and limestone was based on the traditional styles of buildings found in older areas of St. Louis. "These materials have a certain warmth and scale to them that make them more pedestrian friendly.

"The image evolved from a series of meetings where there was a strong consensus that they wanted a traditional building. They were trying to create a sense of a campus environment in Clayton, and with the Ritz Carlton being the first building, we wanted to relate to that building. SRSS associate Robert Riddell said they used several buildings in Clayton as visual cues, especially those along Hanley Road and Forsythe Avenue. "We were looking for a pedestrian nature that that area of Clayton seems to have." The local architect is TRJ Architects. The magnificent masonry on the buildings was supplied by Architectural Art Stone, a Kansas City Company that also is supplying masonry for the new Famous-Barr store at Manchester and 1-270, and the Manchester/1-270 bridge. President Dewayne Enlow said all jobs are pretty challenging, but this one was especially big. "We were able to make some changes to aid the economics of the project by changing, the quoins, which are light colored, precast configurations at the corner of the building. We made some pieces larger than before rather than making individual pieces." The masonry contractor is John Smith Masonry. Dennis DiSantis of Cushman & Wakefield, leasing agent for the Plaza Office building, said that all but the top two floors of the building are leased. Ernst & Young, LLP and Cap Gemini, Husch & Eppenberger LLC and Northern Trust will be the first three tenants of the building.

When asked about the selling point, DiSantis said, "Its a very good Clayton location. It worked well with these tenants as to when their leases expire. This will be a classic building with good views and a good parking ratio of 3.5 spaces per thousand square feet." Keith Manzer, director of sales and marketing for the Plaza In Clayton residential tower, said 31 out of 82 of the condominiums, approximately 38 percent, have been purchased. Prospective buyers can visit the show room to see floor Plans and choose materials for their home. He said "All of the standards are showcased in one way or another, like the limestone in the entry receiving room, the wood floors in the kitchen vignette, and we have the standard millwork, carpet, cabinets and appliances. It really showcases the quality of the tenant finish." To help buyers make their choice, the show center features two scaled dollhouses showing two of the eight to 12 floor plans. Manzer said, "They are literal scale models, three-dimensional with carpet, stone and other materials. These are very unique to St. Louis. Its more real and people can touch it, even pick up a sofa and move it. It gives a good relation to space where a virtual showroom cannot do this. We did the two most prominent floor plans and now we are bringing people to the building." He said most Plaza buyers are familiar with high rises and have second homes. "They are more familiar with construction than the typical first-time buyer. This is the turn key lifestyle. You go in, turn the key, then you go. We have a full time concierge, valet, building manager and doorman. Many of these people go away three and four months at a time and they want the type of safety and security his service affords." With six-foot-high windows, the tower will offer spectacular views of Clayton and the surrounding area. Each of the top three floors will be dedicated to a 6,700-square-foot to 8,100-square-foot penthouse tucked behind three-story pillars and bordered on all four sides by a covered terrace. Condominiums on the remaining floors will range in size from 2,679 square feet to 5,476 square feet.

Staenberg believed the area was ripe for this type of development. "I thought a condo-type building would work with an office building, and I knew people wanted a condominium such as this one. This will have all the amenities that the others don't. We'll have a two-acre amenity deck on top of the parking garage, a swimming pool and a half-acre dog walking area. We're providing things that no one else has thought about, and it will be that classic condominium project that I don't think you'll see duplicated in St. Louis. "Exactly how it looks is how I envisioned it to be. I wanted something that would create a presence and fit in with the neighborhood, but was so distinctive that everyone in St. Louis would, for many years, say, 'God, this is a landmark building."