

## Smart Spaces

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**RISING REDEVELOPMENT.** The first residents of Tampa's Encore Project are slated to arrive next fall.

### Orlando's Creative Village and Tampa's Encore Project have designs on reviving their local economies.

by Kristen Manieri

It's been more than two decades since the phrase "If you build it, they will come" was first whispered across a sleepy Iowa cornfield in the 1989 film "Field of Dreams."

More than a thousand miles from that dusty pastoral scene, Central Florida developers, politicians, entrepreneurs and visionaries swear they can hear the phrase whispered once more, only this time the "they" refers not to bygone baseball greats but to the emerging population of major economic players known as the Creative Class.

Coined by Richard Florida in his book "The Rise of the Creative Class," the term defines a rising socioeconomic class of innovative, knowledge-based, high-wage-earning workers in sectors like engineering, computer programming, design and media. Now composing more than 30 percent of the national workforce, the Creative Class will soon be the leading force of growth in the economy, expected to grow by 10 million-plus jobs in the next decade, predicts Florida.

These are numbers that get developers of Orlando's Creative Village and Tampa's Encore Project salivating. They're betting that the urban theorist is dead-on when he writes, "places that bring together diverse talent accelerate the local rate of economic evolution. The more smart people, and the denser the connection between them, the faster it all goes" (from his book "Who's Your City? How the Creative Economy Is Making Where You Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life").

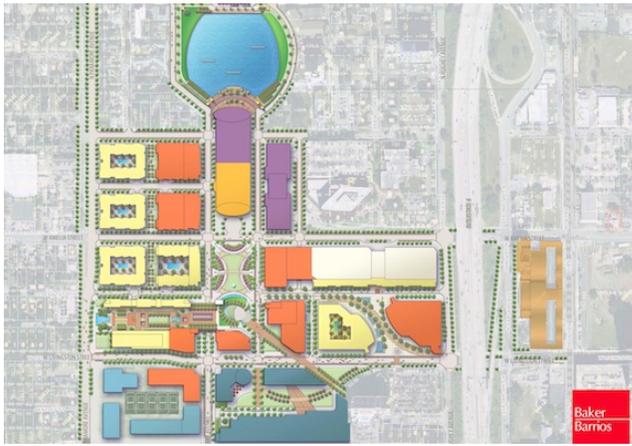
Despite a sluggish economy, both projects are courageously moving ahead.

Encore's horizontal systems (roads, storm systems and sidewalks) are already 55 percent complete. Construction of the first building on the block, called "The Ella," was anticipated to begin by press time. Other vertical elements will be visible in late 2011. And the first residents are slated to arrive by fall 2012. Slowly but surely, the district, which pays homage to music legends with star-studded street names like Ray Charles Boulevard (Charles recorded his first song there in 1948), will unveil 30 acres of mixed-use redevelopment with an adjacent 11-acre park. The urban setting is designed to attract young, knowledge-based workers.

Notably, sustainability will be a chief feature of the Encore. Buildings, for example, will be connected to a master storm water retention system in which all the rain water will be collected and directed to a central vault. The water in the vault will then be used to irrigate the landscape, saving domestic water use. Over that vault will be a solar collection system, with the power generated from the system offsetting the power consumed by the street lights. Also, a sophisticated master chilled water system is being built — essentially a closed loop system to minimize water for air conditioning.

At Orlando's Creative Village, the first phase of the horizontal work is scheduled to begin by the end of this year, after the vacated Amway Arena is leveled. From the ashes, a 68-acre residential, retail and academic neighborhood will emerge over the next decade, designed to lure creative knowledge workers and their families by establishing a new technology hub.

Creative Village will also build on the existing presence of the University of Central Florida's Center for Emerging Media and the Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy (FIEA), with additional educational space planned to accommodate other university programs in simulation, architecture, film, music and other innovative industries.



**HIGH HOPES.** The common thread of both Orlando's Creative Village site plan and aerial perspective is the promise of attracting young professionals.

Noel feels strongly that the presence of higher education, especially in high-demand, high-wage fields like digital media and design, will be the cornerstone of Creative Village's success. "It will be a place where you can start your career in the same community you went to school in," he says. It also means that Creative Village will be producing talented and creative workers that Orlando's already-thriving technology industry needs.

In Central Florida, home to one of the nation's largest digital media and simulation clusters, are existing technology companies that employ more than 30,000 and collectively produce annual revenues estimated at \$9 billion. Growing the technology talent pool and providing opportunity for those smart grads is an innovative urban revitalization strategy that appears promising.

In fact, it's a strategy best described as "If you build it, they will rearrange," says Craig Ustler, whose firm, the Ustler Group, has partnered with the Bank of America to develop Creative Village.

"Orlando already has a lot of people in these industries and in high-tech firms," Ustler explains. "We don't need a huge influx of firms moving in from other places to make Creative Village thrive. Creative Village creates the cluster for these firms to build off each other and benefit from a proximity that they don't experience now."

Ustler thinks the area will attract new companies but believes that "by and large, we are seeding and providing an environment to let what we already have grow. Then, when you position this around mass transportation and affordable housing, it'll do even better than it's doing now."

When Ustler speaks of mass transportation, he's referring to SunRail, which will build a major station a few blocks from Creative Village. After some anxious moments by proponents, the commuter rail transit project received the thumbs up from Florida Gov. Rick Scott in early July. Ustler views the approval as a boon but not necessarily as a savior: "We don't die without SunRail, but Creative Village is meant to take advantage of mass transportation. It's meant to leverage and multiply off of SunRail."

For both Tampa and Orlando, supporters of the development projects have high hopes for the economic impact that will be felt not only in the new districts, but across the entire region as well. Preliminary figures seem to support such optimism. Fishkind & Associates, an Orlando-based economic and financial consulting firm, estimates that the construction phase of Creative Village will create 6,478 construction jobs, resulting in \$227 million in total earnings in the local economy over the entire build-out period, followed by 4,826 permanent jobs supporting 8,195 total jobs and \$296 million in total annual earnings in the local economy post-construction.

Encore's future isn't looking too shabby either, with an estimated 4,103 construction jobs, 8,784 total jobs in the local economy over the 2010-2016 build-out period, followed by 955 permanent jobs supporting 1,374 total jobs in the local economy post-construction. Those are numbers Roxanne Amoroso, Bank of America's senior vice president of community real estate development, is more than happy to share. The bank is a partner on both projects. "We are all about creating opportunities," Amoroso says. "If we do the right type of development in an urban core, it will spread and stabilize an entire area. It is lasting, and it creates long-term opportunities for families."

Among other common partners with ambitious plans are architectural firm Baker Barrios and Harris Corp., providing the technology backbone.

Meanwhile, industry observers are watching, like Bruce Stephenson, director of the master of planning in civic urbanism program at Rollins College in Winter Park, who believes that without downtown Orlando revitalization and commuter rail, the region is destined to become the Detroit of Florida. "Capitalism thrives on innovation and change, and you can only profit from the status quo for so long," says Stephenson. "If we don't invest in this area, why would anyone want to move here? People are going to start leaving."

Creative Village and the Encore Project have other ideas.