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Real Estate and Development

High-rise boom spurs secondary growth

By [Jennifer Shubinski / Staff Writer](#)

As new high-rise projects are being announced almost every week, it is having a side effect for Nevada's economy -- it is bringing in new businesses to cater to the growing boom.

Mark Baker, principal of IBA Consultants, which specializes in the engineering and inspection of high-rise buildings, opened an office in Las Vegas this spring and is consulting on at least 10 high-rise projects throughout the valley. Baker also has offices in Florida and New York.

Similar to others who are moving to Las Vegas to capitalize on the growing market, Baker had worked on projects here before but said at that time there just wasn't enough work to justify outfitting an office and hiring employees.

That was in the late 1990s. Today, among Baker's clients is Turnberry Associates and its Las Vegas projects.

"We expected it to take a year, and it didn't," he said of making connections within the community. "The amount of construction going on is just tremendous, and I think they realize the value of what consultants bring."

San Francisco-based Walters & Wolf is under construction with its new office on Patrick Lane. Norm Shane, vice president, expects the office to open in July and employ about 60 people.

Walters & Wolf specializes in what the industry calls curtain walls -- floor-to-ceiling glass and aluminum that is attached to the outside of buildings.

"There's a lot of work; there's a real demand for higher quality systems in Las Vegas, with the condominiums and higher-end casinos," Shane said.

Among its projects, Walters & Wolf is currently working with Perini Building Co. Inc. on the Red Rock casino in Summerlin and recently finished the Marriott Renaissance near the Las Vegas Convention Center.

The company employs about 850 people on the West Coast, with additional offices in Los Angeles and Seattle.

"Half of our staff is being transplanted from the Bay Area and Los Angeles; the other half is local" Shane said. "There is a feeling that there is a lot of opportunity here for growth, and talented people want to get in here at the beginning."



Construction continues on the first tower of the Residences at MGM Grand on May 10.

Photo by R. Marsh Starks

Herbert Gordon Press Design Associates Inc. is one of the companies that entered the market in the late 1990s, sensing an early need for its services.

"I was actually retiring and I was going to stop (working) in New York City anyway," said Herbert Gordon Press, owner. "We came here thinking we'd stay small."

The interior design firm now employs eight people and has worked on projects at Turnberry Place and is listing clients such as planned condominiums the Majestic, One Las Vegas, Newport Lofts and the Prima de Lago complex at Lake Las Vegas.

Press said when he opened up shop, there were about five companies that took care of all the corporate and residential interior designs.

"Now there are firms coming in from California, trying very desperately to get into this industry. Getting in the industry is not difficult, we find; it's understanding the industry," he said. "There's a mindset and philosophy that's completely different. It's a vertical way of living. It's nice to have a little background; it makes it easier for the client."

And with the background and experience that companies are bringing to Las Vegas comes insights into how the high-rise market is shaping up.

Press said he thinks it's an excellent market, and just the surface is being scratched. But along with that, he said people should be cautious.

"I'm a little leery about some of the developers; some have no experience," he said. "But predominantly they are solid, good builders and are selling a good product."

Baker, who started off his career doing failure inspections of high-rise buildings, said with such large demand for product, construction and labor, problems are bound to happen.

"In Atlantic City, we saw the aftereffects of not enough qualified labor, not enough people to keep track of what was happening. In Miami it was the same thing," he said. "We're seeing that in Las Vegas now: too much work and not enough qualified people. It's a pattern that we've experienced before."

Shane also said a construction labor shortage could becoming an increasingly bigger problem for the Las Vegas Valley.

"I think we're about to hit a boom point; we're on the up tick of the construction boom," he said. "There's an enormous amount of work. Even if half of it all gets built, there will be a shortage of construction labor and trades."

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