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SUNLOFT

story by: Howie Benidt

Sunloft Center Brings A New Look and A New Lifestyle to Downtown Punta Gorda



A magnificent new edifice is being created in the heart of downtown Punta Gorda, which will be the centerpiece of the entire area, and is sure to set a new standard for the design tone and positive energy of the city's center.

It's called Sunloft Center and it combines all three dimensions of downtown living into one unique complex, which boasts offices, restaurants, retail shops, and fifteen one-of-a-kind residences on the 4th floor.

Presently, Ken Dunn and his solid team from Punta Gorda Construction Management can be found actively moving building materials to assure a timely completion, for eager city residents. "We are on track and making great progress; everything is running according to plan," explained the Schulzes.

Ann and Martin Schulz (Florida Insel Properties - FLIP) are the local representatives of Franz Hartl, from Vienna, Austria, owner of the Sunloft Center, now under construction at the site of the former Professional Center.

Progress is somewhat of an understatement, to describe what is taking place behind the massive construction fence. It's only a matter of time before, the concrete framework will be in place and the outer facades will begin to take shape. And what an amazing exterior it will be. The polished prize will appear to be a series of different types of buildings all in a one-square city block.

And while it appears that the trophy building is merely a large hole at present, the Schulzes can't help but smile with delight, conscious that at one point Franz was considering alternative ideas for the project as a whole.

What lies beneath the bearings of the skyscraping crane is more than the frame work for a groundbreaking development. In fact, what you'll discover is the story of a project that wasn't supposed to happen at all.

After moving to Punta Gorda in 1991, Franz Hartl, began to invest in real estate.

His first purchase was the Ann Street Mini Storage in Punta Gorda and soon after he built Exit 31 Storage in Deep Creek. In April of 2004, he decided to buy The Professional Center, a four-story office building then located on West Marion Avenue in the center of downtown Punta Gorda.

His intention was to replace the building's unattractive dark glass windows with clear, high-impact glass and also complete a major refurbishing of the interior offices.

Then just four months after that plan was taking shape, Hurricane Charley swept through downtown Punta Gorda in August of 2004, and destroyed The Professional Building in addition to a large part of Punta Gorda's downtown area.

Franz weighed his options, one of which was to take the insurance money, demolish the battered building and sell the desirable land on which it stood. But he decided against that option explaining to the Schulzes that he wanted to build this for his children's future.

He decided to build on the undamaged concrete structure of the battered building and develop a new office complex. But a variety of complications arose including resistance by some City officials who voiced displeasure at erecting such a modern, contemporary building occupying the entire block in that location. Within a month, a new concept was designed which was a larger structure, conforming to all of the City's regulations.

Franz became enthused about the idea of a "multi-use" building containing class A offices, restaurants, retail shops, and residences on the top floor.

Franz was convinced that such a development would act as a "town center" and, with its central location, not only increase the choices for office space rentals, shopping and dining but would also appeal to those who liked the idea of downtown living, particularly with the closeness of the parks and the harbor just a short walk away.

The Schulzes were aware of the City of Seaside, Florida, a master-planned community on the Florida panhandle midway between Fort Walton Beach and Panama City. It places emphasis on "mixed-use" developments incorporating many types of residential and business entities in one convenient location. Pedestrian amenities that characterize Seaside ap-



The logo for 'Residences at Sunloft Center' features the word 'Residences' in a large, multi-colored font where each letter is a different color and shape, resembling a house or building. Below it, 'at Sunloft Center' is written in a smaller, blue, serif font.

Residences at Sunloft Center

pealed to the Shultzes who envisioned a similar environment for Punta Gorda.

Franz, Ann and Martin knew they needed a sophisticated, professional architectural talent who could help to develop the idea into practical reality. Inquiries with Seaside and local references led them to Pantsari Architecture. After several discussions with Bill Pantsari and his wife, Jennifer Shoultz, an interior designer, Franz, Martin and Ann were convinced they had discovered the expertise they needed to create the project they envisioned.

Bill Pantsari's distinguished career as an architect began with an astonishing education. He honed his skills at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris; before receiving a B.S. from the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta; next as a Fulbright scholar at the Technological University of Helsinki, Finland, then culminating in a Master of Architecture from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

After many discussions with Franz, the Schulzes and the City, the Sunloft project came to shape in Bill's mind as a "New Florida" design encompassing new wind and flood resistance features, new directions in energy efficiency and "green eco-sensitive" building techniques, all of which would coalesce in a traditional urban design and a pedestrian-oriented lifestyle. "While Sunloft derives its inspiration from exclusive, resort-oriented developments, this building is transcended, because it supports an inclusive year-round city," Pantsari noted.

Once the concept was agreed upon, they knew they were going to need a dependable and skilled construction company to complete the project in a timely manner. Having worked as the former supervisor of the Exit 31 Storage project, and instrumental to the recovery of Franzes properties following hurricane Charley, Franz insisted on using Ken Dunn and his team of local sub-contractors.

With a commitment to the project and a steadfast team, the dream of Sunloft was within arms reach. The building's exterior design features 24 facades, which appear as an urban "fabric" of many buildings, rather than a one-dimensional structure occupying the entire block. The facades are made of a variety of materials, including brick masonry which will blend with the established palette of Punta Gorda's pedestrian zone and share the aesthetic design to the adjacent historical courthouse and the neighboring brick structures.



The logo for 'Plaza at Sunloft Center' features the word 'Plaza' in a large, multi-colored font where each letter is a different color and shape, resembling a house or building. Below it, 'at Sunloft Center' is written in a smaller, red, serif font. To the right of the word 'Plaza' are icons of a fork and a spoon.

Plaza at Sunloft Center

Stucco and “tabby” complement the masonry, consistent with urban architecture through the Coastal South. First used in St. Augustine, Florida in the late 1500’s, “tabby” is the oldest manufactured building material in the United States. Also known as “coastal concrete”, tabby incorporates crushed shells - coquina, scallop and oyster, providing natural color and texture in the facades reflecting the marine heritage of Punta Gorda.

The Sunloft Center “mixed use” development occupies 154,000 sq. ft. in four floors, with 110 covered parking spaces. On the first floor, or street level, there will be nearly 14,000 sq. ft. with retail areas measuring approximately 5,500 sq. ft. and a restaurant occupying roughly 5900 sq. ft.

The second and third floors are entirely composed of office space measuring 17,000 sq. ft. on each floor. The fourth floor is solely residential with 15 residences each varying in floor design and sizes ranging from 1520 sq. ft. to more than 2200 sq. ft. Each residence will have two private parking spaces in the covered parking garage at the rear of the complex.

At the lower level, in the center of the complex, is an outdoor courtyard. There will be a 3,000 sq. ft. central common sky terrace on the top level with two spas as well as outdoor garden terraces and balconies.

The Schulzes emphasize that all of the residential units will contain top-quality fixtures, appliances, ultra-tech wiring for any modern tech devices, sound resistant walls and insulated windows.

The building’s entire ground floor level is sealed against flooding to the base flood elevation. In case of impending

flooding, four-foot panels can be installed around the building’s perimeter to completely seal the interior, meeting FEMA requirements.

The Schulzes have as a top priority attracting a trendy restaurant to become the magnet for locals and visitors. The restaurant they hope to attract would have a different format and cuisine than current restaurants already doing business in downtown Punta Gorda.

“More choice for local residents and visitors means more business for everyone,” said Martin.

Drive downtown on Marion Avenue and you can’t miss the construction site which is colorfully surrounded by a lifestyle graphic nearly 150 feet in perimeter.

Some customizing design work continues at this writing but residence sizes and overall designs are complete and six of the fifteen residences already have reserve deposits. The Schulzes are welcoming reserve deposits for the remaining residences. Since final asking prices for the condos won’t be established for some time, they ask for a \$10,000 deposit which can be returned for a full refund if prices end up higher than the buyer’s budget allows. The Schulzes said that this arrangement protects them and the buyers.

As you can see from the impressive building illustrations accompanying this article, The Sunloft Center is going to be an exciting addition to the growth of downtown Punta Gorda and it will be a lasting tribute to the vision and commitment of Franz Hartl. **ess**

The Schulzes can be reached at www.sunloftcenter.com.

