

# DiamondView Tower



## Playing Ball With Downtown Revitalization

By Audrey Sarquilla  
Located directly next to the San Diego Padres Petco Park, **DiamondView Tower** is one of the first Class A office towers to be built in association with a major league ballpark. The 15-story building, which opened just in time for the Padres season in Spring 2007, is only the second office high-rise to open in downtown San Diego in the last 15 years. DiamondView Tower has become a major part of San Diego's Ballpark District, a 60-block area surrounding Petco Park, and a significant factor in the district's revitalization. The former warehouse district area had virtually been abandoned only a few years earlier and has

since attracted a growing mix of elements that attract residents, employers and visitors. DiamondView tenants provided approximately 800 new jobs, which has led to an increase in more daytime activity to local retail shops and restaurants, transforming the Ballpark District and surrounding East Village area into a vibrant urban center. The development investment within the district is expected to exceed \$4 billion, according to the Centre City Development Corporation, (CCDC) the public, non-profit corporation created by the City of San Diego to staff and implement downtown redevelopment projects and programs.

## A Team Approach to Overcoming Challenges

Developing and building DiamondView Tower presented early challenges. The 1.15 acre-site on which DiamondView sits was originally owned by JMI Realty, the master developer of San Diego's Ballpark District. JMI Realty is the real estate subsidiary of JMI Services, Inc., founded by John Moores, who also owns the San Diego Padres. Cisterra Partners, LLC, developer of DiamondView, purchased the acquisition rights for the DiamondView Tower site from JMI Realty, and Prudential Insurance Company of America became a partner in the project in December of 2004.

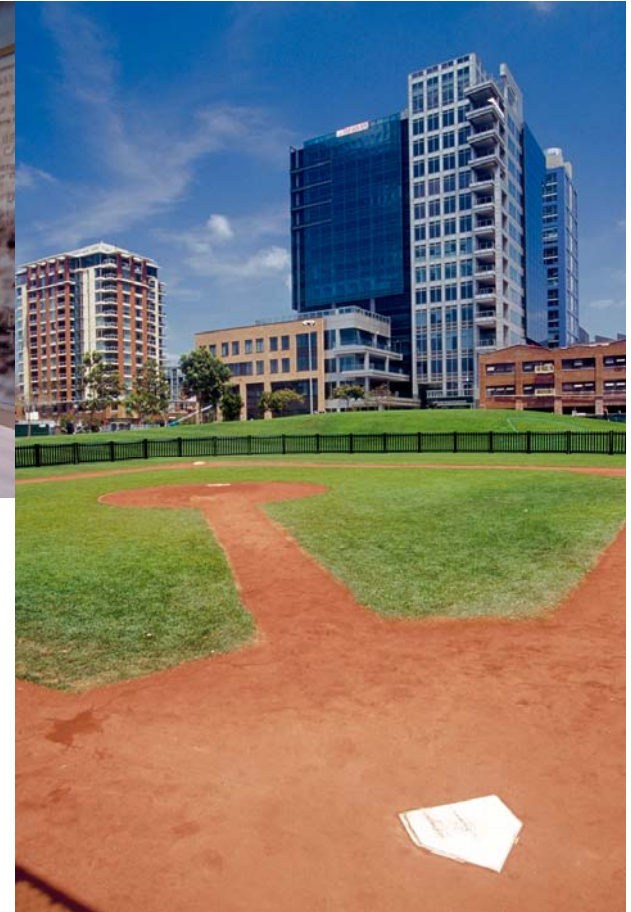
Project challenges included financial backing of the building until it was at least 35 percent pre-leased and receiving approval from the CCDC. CB Richard Ellis was brought on as the leasing broker for DiamondView, yet Cisterra Partners also had a hands-on, active role in all of the leasing. According to Kraig Kristofferson, senior vice President of CB Richard Ellis, overcoming the early leasing challenges took faith on the part of the perspective tenant – faith that Cisterra Partners' dream of developing a one-of-a-kind, iconic building would come true. "They had to trust that what we were showing them was what the end product would look like," Kristofferson said.

A major hurdle in developing DiamondView was for Cisterra Partners to receive approval by CCDC. At the time, the site of DiamondView Tower was the largest tract proposed to be under development in downtown. With its premium location next



to Petco Park, the project was closely watched by the public, CCDC and the San Diego City Council. In 2002, the Padres and Cisterra Partners presented plans to the CCDC for DiamondView Tower. The project, which had tenants pre-leased, conformed in every material respect to the City's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Padres, which was approved by the voters in 1998. However, the project was initially rejected by CCDC, who thought that the project would block off the ballpark from the rest of East Village.

The building's location was originally planned to be in centerfield, not at its current location in right field. However, the size and location of the "Park at the Park" was an issue. The Park at the Park is a grassy slope above the outfield fence and is open during game time to fans for five dollars. When no games are being played, the Park at the Park serves as a free local park for area residents. The city and CCDC decided they wanted the Park at the Park to be larger and visually open to J Street



and the rest of East Village. To accommodate the city and CCDC, the Padres and Cisterra revised their proposal by increasing the green space portion of the park and moving the building's location to the right field side.

Another challenge involved the building height and envelope, which was originally envisioned to be short and stocky. This was debated for more than a year before the city agreed to its current height of 15 stories, with a more slender tower and setbacks providing view channels for other

nearby buildings to the ballpark. "After about a year of proposed adjustments to the project and many negotiations with CCDC, we were finally able to come to a compromise and move forward with the revised plans," said Jason Wood, senior vice president of Cisterra Partners. "Our vision for DiamondView Tower was to create a landmark building that serves as the cornerstone for business, retail, recreation and dining for the entire area. We hoped to bring new life to one of San Diego's most blighted neighborhoods and we think we have done just that." In November of 2004 the San Diego City Council approved DiamondView Tower, and the building began construction in June of 2005. "Once we finally received the go ahead from the city, we were focused on completing this project," said Wood. "During the project's design, we were pulling permits to expedite any unnecessary construction delay. This helped to put the project on the fast track to completion, which enabled us to complete the project on schedule."

### **A Diamond in the Rough**

The proximity to the ballpark and the sky box-like view of the playing field as well as the Pacific Ocean and the downtown skyline became key marketing points. Since DiamondView was a new building, in a new area with no similar buildings close by, prospective tenants relied on renderings and models to visualize what the building would look like. Cisterra Partners developed renderings of the view of the Padres' playing field from various floor levels. A hot air balloon ride that would take passengers 15 stories up to see the views was planned for the ground

breaking ceremony but heavy winds kept the balloon tethered to the ground.

Early in the development process critics predicted that the building would be a tough sell citing the location outside of the heart of downtown San Diego and the top market rents Cisterra was asking. However, with only one other new building in the leasing competition and relatively few large spaces in existing downtown

buildings, Cisterra Partners was convinced that DiamondView would be successful, especially once the building began to take shape and the community had something tangible to be excited about. According to Kristofferson, "We were able to deliver what we promised and now the interest in DiamondView Tower has been tremendous. The unique amenities and Ballpark District location have made DiamondView one of the leading businesses addresses in downtown, if not all of San Diego."

### **The Ultimate Skybox**

DiamondView Tower totals 305,255 square feet, including two floors of retail space (68,539 square feet) and 12 floors of



office space (236,716 square feet). San Diego-based architectural firm Carrier Johnson combined the old-style distinction of East Village with the modern look of the San Diego skyline into the design. The first four floors feature a façade of brick which is characteristic of the area, while a contemporary steel and glass tower dramatically rises from the brick base to complement the San Diego skyline. DiamondView Tower tenants include a mix of real estate, legal and business professional tenants, such as Cox Communications, CB Richard Ellis; Comerica Bank; Grubb & Ellis|BRE Commercial. Retail tenants include

Comerica Bank; FIT Athletic Club; It's A Grind Coffee House; Prato Cleaners; and Well Heeled Spa.

The building also offers multiple amenities including views of Petco Park, the San Diego Bay, the Coronado Bridge, Balboa Park and many other local landmarks. Each floor includes balconies with skybox-like views of the Padres' playing field. The building's 15th floor features a business and entertainment facility, nicknamed "the Ultimate Skybox." With more than 5,000 square feet of space and landmark views, the Ultimate Skybox features floor-to-ceiling windows, indoor and outdoor bars and seating areas, an outdoor fireplace, multiple television monitors with video conferencing capabilities and a catering kitchen. The Ultimate Skybox accommodates 160 people and is available to DiamondView Tower tenants during the day at no charge. Also, the facility is rented out evenings and weekends to companies and individuals for corporate events and private parties. True to its focus on baseball, DiamondView creates a distinctive experience for visitors and tenants alike by integrating baseball and the history of baseball into the entire building. On the outside of the building's entrance, visitors are greeted by two 30-foot by 40-foot graphics of legendary baseball players, Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth. The lobby, which has been nicknamed the Hall of Fame Lobby, features a series of 30 quotes from players, coaches and broadcasters. The lobby also features a series of 35 images of specific players from baseball's past and present, such as Barry Bonds, Mark McGuire, Jackie Robinson and Willie Mays, which will be layered atop the images of the quotes. A large-size TV

monitor broadcasts sports news and, of course, Padres games. The building's elevators are lined with glass-etched scorecards of game eight of the 1912 Boston Red Sox/New York Giants World Series, in which the Red Sox won by errors in the bottom of the tenth inning when Giants outfielder Fred Snodgrass muffed a fly ball allowing the winning run to score.

With uncharacteristic views and quality design and amenities, DiamondView Tower has experienced enormous success while sparking more office development in the East Village area of San Diego, as well as the development of other commercial projects in the surrounding area, including new shops, services and trendy destinations.

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