

The Man Building Downtown



Liz Peck

Just as many New Yorkers have lost patience, and possibly interest, construction at ground zero has begun in earnest. After all the wrangling and posturing, and the heart-breaking efforts to console the inconsolable, Lower Manhattan is deep into its transformation.

Fifty-nine public and private construction projects are under way downtown, at a collective estimated cost of \$24 billion. Office buildings, the World Trade Center Memorial, transportation hubs, parks, schools, apartment complexes, and retail centers are all part of the plan. Five years from now, much of this work will be complete — if all goes well.

Those innocent-sounding words will doubtless be keeping Charles Maikish up at night for the foreseeable future. Mr. Maikish is the executive director of the Lower Manhattan Construction Command Center, appointed to the post about two years ago by Governor Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg.

It is the job of the command center, and of Mr. Maikish, to coordinate the construction operations downtown — to facilitate the work, minimize the impact of the various projects on the daily lives of those who live and work in the

Please see REAL ESTATE, page B8.

REAL ESTATE from page 1
area, and communicate to those concerned just what is going on.

This is old terrain to Mr. Maikish, both literally and figuratively. "I started out as a young field engineer in 1968 working at the World Trade Center site," he said. "The center was built between 1966 and 1974. It took eight years — people forget it took a long time, too."

In many ways, the original construction was a walk in the park compared to the obstacles the builders face today. "The setting was very different," Mr. Maikish said. "In 1968, I was at the bottom of the totem pole and had to work Saturdays. In those days, there was nowhere to get lunch in Lower Manhattan on a Saturday. There were less than 1,000 people living south of Canal and west of Broadway; now there are more than 40,000. We could build in double work shifts back then because no one was around and no one cared about the noise or the dust. We've seen a huge transformation."

Mr. Maikish has been involved in downtown Manhattan for 37 years, working primarily for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, where he played a role in restoring ferry service to Lower Manhattan, and then restoring the World Trade Center itself in 1990. Eventually he moved to JPMorgan Chase, where he managed the bank's internal real estate activities and security services.

In 1990, the World Trade Center was becoming outdated, so upon his arrival Mr. Maikish and others undertook to rejuvenate the complex. After the 1993 bombings at the center, the Port Authority board appointed Mr. Maikish to oversee the repair of the center.

It was an eerie harbinger of events to come, and also an important moment in his career.

"Why did I get involved in the rebuilding of the World Trade Center?" he asked. "I believe firmly that the best response to an act of terrorism is recovery, reconstruction, and restoration. I lost four of my staff in 1993 — it became personal."

"The 1993 bombs at the Trade Center went off on the 26th of February. On March 19, we moved back in, 3 1/2 weeks later. We quickly reanimated the center; we underwrote retail; we had free trips to the observation deck; PATH was free. We worked to remove the visible scars. We weren't geniuses in this; we con-

sulted with experts in the field. The Israelis told us that repopulating is the best way to recover from a terrorist act, to bring life back as soon as possible.

"The problem with 9/11 is that we can't erase the visible scars like we did in 1993. After the first bombings, it wasn't too long before the trade center was bright and shiny again. We can't do that this time."

Mr. Maikish explained why rebuilding ground zero has taken so long. "The layman's response today is, 'Why can't we get this rebuilt?' The complexity of the job, and the constituency that needed to be heard if you wanted to do the job right, is enormous. It needed to be constructed to be something different, not reconstructed."

"When I got down here, I realized this is a very complex situation.

"Could it have happened faster?



MAIKISH

Maybe. Finally, the governor made a decision to go forward with the Freedom Tower, and the mayor and the governor came to a decision about the memorial. On restoring the retail, and the staging and sequencing of the work, the mayor got involved. It's a result of the executive leadership of the mayor and the governor that if you go down there now, you see that every inch of that site is under construction. As the governor said, we've gone from concept to concrete.

"Don't forget that the WTC site is 16 acres. There was a plan adopted for all of Lower Manhattan, including the South Ferry project, the transit center, the reconstruction of all the roadways, and so on. When you look at all the projects that will be accomplished over the next five years, it is huge."

Mr. Maikish's function sunsets in 2010. Certainly construction on the plan will not be finished. What can we expect?

"People judge success on seeing the physical edifice, the edifice complex. In five years, the Freedom Tower will have been topped out, the memorial will be open, though the museum probably won't be finished. The transit center and the West Side Highway will be finished. The lion's share of the master plan will have been done," he said. "The good news is there's construction all over. The bad news is there's construction all over."

Mr. Maikish and his team of 10 professionals are in charge of coordinating these myriad projects, which will ultimately include 14 million square feet of office space and about 6,000 rental apartments. The overall plan also incorporates substantial infrastructure issues such as efforts to resolve both foot and automobile congestion downtown, and to im-

prove the communications infrastructure.

Now, of course, is when Mr. Maikish's job gets much tougher. His department must oversee the construction engineering and traffic management, as well as an enforcement task force that coordinates agencies within the city to monitor compliance with the permits, air quality guidelines, and delivery schedules.

He oversees all this activity from a particularly appropriate vantage point, as he became a full-time downtown resident in 1998. In the past several years, he said, he has seen a sizable influx of young families. New schools are being built, and parks, catering to the growing residential community.

"The success of residential has been beyond anybody's expectations," he said.

Is the Wall Street area still a terrorist target? "People are concerned about that," he said. "But the worst defeat that we can suffer is for the terrorists to change the way we live. The technology exists to provide a safe and secure environment. The use of intelligence and security devices, such as cameras — we need to do all this, but not in an intrusive way. The public needs to know that our government, along with the corporate world, is doing this. Goldman Sachs is opening a building right across from the Freedom Tower. They are not stupid. They wouldn't be doing that without assurances about security."

"There's \$22 to \$25 billion of investment being made. It's going to create a quality environment that you're going to want to be part of," he said.

peck10021@aol.com