

# Tampa Bay Times

## Encore development pays homage to urban Tampa's musical past



Robert Trigaux, Times Business Columnist

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### TAMPA

Architects always search for a theme to visualize or story to tell when considering the look and feel of a project. To Robert K. Ledford II, one of the lead architects at Baker Barrios Architects in Tampa, the Encore housing and mixed-use commercial project is a dream come true.

The 40-acre square northeast of downtown Tampa is the former site of Central Park Village, whose black musical roots flourished in the segregated 1930s and '40s and resonate today in the design of the ambitious project. Sure, the major streets and buildings pay homage to the names of music legends like Ray Charles (the main boulevard bears his name) or Ella Fitzgerald (the first housing apartment will bear her first name).

But through the architect's eye for fancy and detail, the buildings themselves are meant to project musical notes and symbols.

Ledford, 38, talks about the "skins" or exterior surfaces of the Encore buildings. He points in renderings to the architectural representations of a musician's baton, a treble clef and even the musical notes themselves in the look of such planned Encore apartment buildings as Ella, Trio, Reed and Tempo. Ledford is at ease with music; his father was a music teacher and band conductor.

It's even in the project's name. Encore, says Webster's dictionary, is a "demand by the audience, shown by continual applause, for the repetition of a piece of music or another appearance of the performers."

I visited earlier this month with Ledford at the Baker Barrios Architects office he runs in downtown Tampa. Ledford,



a native Floridian and Florida State University graduate, helped open the firm's Tampa office as an expansion from its headquarters in Orlando.

"As a firm, we like urban projects like Encore," Ledford says. "They are exciting and complex. They are challenging to make it work within those boundaries," which in this case are the four streets of Central Avenue to the west, Cass to the South, Nebraska to the east and Scott to the north.

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This is the second column to focus on the Encore project. The first, published April 17, introduced readers to Encore and some of the project's key players, including Roxanne Amoroso. She's the senior vice president leading the project for Bank of America, which has partnered on Encore with the Tampa Housing Authority.

Amoroso recently offered some updates at Encore, from the adding of streetlights and pavers awaiting installation to roads about to be paved and permit approval of the water chiller plant. The start of construction on Ella, anticipated in the spring to begin by June, is now slated for late August. The federal Housing and Urban Development agency, or HUD, is the last source of funding to finally sign off on Ella.

Projects this big, and requiring such a broad swath of funding sources, take time, both Amoroso and Ledford acknowledge.

Why explore Encore in multiple columns?

Because the project is a rare survivor both of the latest recession and a larger project called Civitas that failed to get liftoff.

Because Encore, a brownfield site, is an unusual opportunity to inject fresh housing and commercial space into a depressed corner of downtown Tampa ignored for many years.

Because Encore just might be catching the wave, however modest, of economic recovery that could help it come to fruition and serve as a new development connector between downtown and Ybor City to the east.

And, quite simply, because Encore is a pretty cool project once you get to know it better. Just be patient. I'll be looking at different slices of Encore off and on for the next few years.

On a recent tour of the construction site, it's clear the pace of change is slow but steady. Since first walking the mostly dirt-piled project in April, no ground has broken yet on apartments or commercial buildings. Landscaping is nonexistent. Encore is in the early stage of moving earth around, preparing roads for paving and setting sidewalks, and finalizing a complex underground infrastructure.

That ranges from electrical wiring to storm drainage and a sophisticated loop system of chilled water that will transport water to and from the Encore buildings to help reduce the need for conventional air conditioning.

Of course, there is no guarantee Encore will come together, especially if the economy falters. Even Ledford, optimist that he is, realizes this is no slam dunk.

"For those with big dreams, there is the possibility of not seeing them realized," he concedes. But he's a big believer in the backers of Encore. And he tips his hat to BofA's Amoroso who, he says, is not only a demanding overseer but one unlikely to accept defeat.

Encore can become the "knuckle" connecting downtown and Ybor, he says. Its success could encourage other owners in the area to update their properties.

Rule one of any project is never over-promise. Still, if half of these hopes are met, "Encore" may be a better, broader name than first imagined.

## .FAST FACTS

### The Encore project

**Why call it Encore?** It plays off the idea of a new opportunity and salutes the black music roots of the Central Avenue area where singer Ray Charles in 1946 wrote *I Found My Baby There* and Ella Fitzgerald co-wrote *A-Tisket A-Tasket*. The 1950s song *The Twist* got its start here.

**Where:** On outskirts of downtown Tampa bordered by Central Avenue, Cass, Nebraska and Scott.

**What it replaced:** Central Park Village public housing.

**Name of first apartments to be built:** Ella.

**Designed by:** Baker Barrios Architects.

**Key funding:** Stimulus funds, HUD's neighborhood stabilization program.

**Joint venture:** 50-50 between Bank of America and Tampa Housing Authority.

**View Encore live:** <http://tinyurl.com/5uvwuds>

**History:** Watch WEDU video of area's rich black history:  
<http://tinyurl.com/3kbh6fa>.

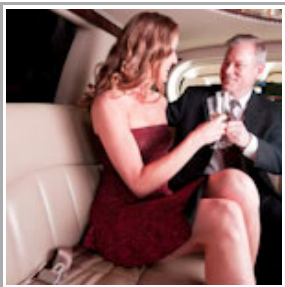
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