

People In The News

Developer inspired by New Urbanism

By Douglas Sams
STAFF WRITER

When Katharine Kelley grew up, the nation was taking notice of the way her hometown of Atlanta was growing — sometimes for the wrong reasons.

The massive influx of people, primarily to the city's northern suburbs, combined with development patterns geared to the automobile, produced an overabundance of shopping centers, strip malls, traffic-choked highways and, in the end, a national reputation for sprawl.

And, yet, that climate of rapid growth also produced a smaller school of developers within Atlanta, including Kelley, who has become one of the city's champions of New Urbanism, a movement that features the adaptation of historic buildings to new uses, and the emphasis on walkable streets and connectivity to existing transportation options.

Today, her firm, **Green Street Properties**, and the developer **Jamestown Properties**, plan to transform the city's former Sears Roebuck & Co. building on Ponce de Leon into one of the South's high-profile examples of New Urbanism, a mix of offices, shops and restaurants in a gentrifying intown neighborhood known as the Old Fourth Ward.

Green Street recently filed plans to redevelop the building into more than a half million square feet of new office and retail, 204 residential units and 160 hotel rooms.

It's the type of project that has fascinated Kelley since she was still in high school and visited Boston. There she saw projects such as Quincy Market in Faneuil Hall, which featured festival marketplaces, a concept developed by The Rouse Co. as a way to reinvigorate downtowns.

"I didn't know what they were back then, so I just called them people places," said Kelley, president and CEO of Green Street and a director with Jamestown.

Those "people places" became part of the inspiration for her career pursuing dense mixed-use urban developments that were not only sound investments but also gathering places.

"The bottom line is always the driver for a commercial real estate project," said Walter Brown, a Green Street senior vice president. "But she also wants to build something that stands that test of time, that's functional not only today but



EXECUTIVE PROFILE KATHARINE KELLEY

Age: 48 **Hometown:** Atlanta

Education: Bachelor of Science, University of North Carolina; master's degree, real estate development, Columbia University; MBA, Harvard University

Current job: President, CEO, Green Street Properties; Director, Jamestown

Previous job: Senior vice president, Post Properties

Family: Husband, Chad Riedel; three children

Hobbies: Running, collecting antique doorknobs

75 years from now. She believes if you build something that no one loves it's one of the worst things you can do for any environment."

Her father, Blaine Kelley, was her early influence on her philosophy.

He developed the suburban Concourse Corporate Center near Perimeter Mall, home of the "King" and "Queen" office towers and assembled the land for the Windward Development, the mixed-use residential and office development in Alpharetta built on more than 2,950 acres of farmland. But, her father also saw a return of people to Atlanta's core, and eventually shifted his focus to urban redevelopment. His \$500 million Midtown Promenade Two building's "neon fins on top" design got a mention in Tom Wolfe's novel "A Man in Full."

In restoring The Castle, a city landmark on 15th Street that's also in Midtown, Kelley developed a love for blending the old and the new, for reawakening the history of a building and putting it back to use.

Kelley eventually joined **Post Properties Inc.**, founded by John Williams, known as the city's apartment king, though much to his chagrin. Williams gave Kelley her first big chance to create a development in the

New Urbanist fashion, a 85-acre site in Cobb County on the banks of the Chattahoochee River.

Post considered a plan for the site that would have created a typical garden apartment project.

Williams wanted to try something different, and gave Kelley the freedom to pursue it.

She remembered a lecture by the developer Robert Davis and André Duany, whose famous Seaside project along Florida's Gulf Coast was the talk of architectural schools across the United States.

"I thought maybe we could do something like that here," Kelley said.

Kelley then convinced DPZ, Duany's urban planning company, to take the role as master planner for Post Riverside.

Post opened up the book on Seaside and used it as a model.

Post Riverside became 537 apartment units and a 10-story, 225,000-square-foot office building connected by tree-lined sidewalks and roadways, an echo of America's pre-automobile era.

"We were pushing our comfort zone," Kelley said. "We were ready to take the risk and try a new, more urban form."

Today, Kelley faces another pivotal project in Ponce City Market.

Jamestown bought the 2 million-square-foot Midtown building — the largest brick structure in the Southeast — from the city of Atlanta for \$15.4 million.

Jamestown has a similar project in Manhattan, known as Chelsea Market, a former Nabisco factory that has been redeveloped into a 1.1 million-square-foot magnet for high-tech and media companies including The Food Network, Time Warner and Google, along with a mix of local restaurants and shops.

Chelsea Market was a cluster of 15 former Nabisco industrial buildings, some more than 120 years old, that were renovated and converted.

Ponce City Market is similar. It once served as the Sears regional warehouse, catalog distribution center and retail store. It was a center of downtown commerce.

Jamestown and Green Street Properties expect to inject at least \$180 million into the redevelopment.

Atlanta leaders think Ponce City Market might create an urban "renaissance" for Ponce de Leon and the Old Fourth Ward.

The building sits right on top of the Atlanta Beltline, a sweeping project that could transform intown Atlanta.

For Kelley, like her father, it's yet another chance to bring a passion for the redevelopment of urban districts — the same inspiration she felt when she first saw people shopping in Boston's Quincy Market more than 30 years ago.

"There is something about the city that is uplifting to the human spirit," Kelley said. "It lets people be who they really are. It allows for individual expression. It creates a gathering place."

Reach Sams at dsams@bizjournals.com.

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