

ASBURY PARK SUN

FROM THE FOLKS AT TRICITYNEWS

February 14, 2016

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ISTAR RALLIES HANDEL & OTHERS FOR BOYS & GIRLS CLUB UPGRADE PRO BONO WORK INCLUDES 3-STORY BUILDING, MAIN SITE AND POOL REDESIGN

By Michelle Gladden

There's a new commitment brewing on the city's west side and renowned architect Gary Handel has signed on to be a part of it.

Known for his award-winning urban growth strategy, Handel specializes in using mixed-use building designs to support density growth in buildings and neighborhoods across the globe.

Handel [shown at right], recognized for his work in Boston's downtown, as a founding board member of the New York's Friends of the High Line, and at the National September 11 Memorial, brings his expertise to Asbury Park with the 1101 Ocean Avenue design – a 16-story rebuild at the former Esperanza site.



He is among a team of consultants who pledge to redesign and upgrade the Asbury Park Boys and Girls Club's over 70-year-old building, located on the west side along Monroe Avenue.

Organized by waterfront redeveloper iStar local lead Brian Cheripka, the transformation includes creating a new three-story building across the street where two vacant shells now sit, and an upgrade of the existing facility's façade and pool.

"Our commitment goes far beyond the waterfront," said Cheripka [shown at right], who sits on the Boys and Girls Club of Monmouth County Board of Directors. "Our responsibility is to the entire city. We really want to better the whole community and move it forward."



iStar's commitment to build up its 35 acres along the waterfront picked up tempo at year's end when its 34-unit luxury Monroe Condominium began to take shape, the refurbishment at the historic Asbury Lanes bowling and music event venue launched, and construction began at 1101 Ocean Avenue, a 16-story mixed use structure designed by Handel. The former Esperanza site will be transformed in a mixed use structure complete with luxury condominiums, hotel rooms, and retail space.

And while, Cheripka was named to the Boys and Girls Club board just one year ago, work to help support its programs began over three years ago when the financial institution turned local developer launched an Ambassador program that hires approximately 100 city residents [ages 18 to 50] to help manage guest relations along the waterfront by answering questions and giving directions.



Marrying their goals with the local nonprofit's mission to provide a safe environment for the city's children to learn and grow, was a no brainer, Cheripka said.

"Look, I'm not on any Board of Directors in my own community but I am on the board in Asbury Park because I believe the needs of this community are tremendous," Cheripka said.

"Where do the kids go when there is an incident like we saw last week?" he said in reference to the Feb. 1 afternoon drive by shooting near the Boys and Girls Club. "They run inside the Boys and Girls Club. The club is a safe haven and it becomes part of our obligation to get involved, and eventually, if we are doing this right, they could end up having opportunities other kids didn't have a couple years ago."

Handel will be tasked with designing a three-story building complete with programing space, classrooms and what will become the nonprofit organization's administrative offices. He also will redesign the existing building's façade.



"Our goal is foster an environment where they can learn and grow, be able to discover their creative skills and how to apply those talents that can lead to future opportunities in life," said Doug Eagles, Director of The Boys and Girls of Monmouth County.

"This has become so important because the reality is, if these kids are not here in the club they are out in the streets exposed to the violence," Eagles [shown at right] said. "That shooting occurred near feet from our club at a time when a lot of kids were making their way from school to our club. I have to commend the staff in providing a safe environment by continuing the regular programming during the lock down."



And now pro bono contracted work, rallied by Cheripka and totalling over \$100,000, will make way for an expansion of the club's programming and resources.

Oakhurst-based Greenway Demolition has signed on to raze the vacant two-story home and warehouse the club purchased in 2012. The site clearing and remediation is expected to be complete next month at an estimated cost of \$60,000.

"One of the reason we like giving back to the area is because my whole family grew up in this area," said company president Dominick Mazza. "The importance of donating your service is to give back to an area that needs the support and needs the work."

Mazza employs close to 10 Asbury Park residents.

While American Pool's scope runs across the country, with 23 subsidiaries located in 15 states and Washington D.C., as well as in Toronto and Ottawa, their Central New Jersey crew will lead a volunteer charge to renovate the Boys and Girls Club's pool.

"Their pool [shown at right] is really underutilized because of its age and the lack of available parking," Cheripka said. "The club spends a lot of time and resources keeping the pool up and operational. If this can relieve some of the burdens then that's what we are going to do."



American Pool's work can be found at County Clubs, condominiums, and community pools across the nation, as well as the 911 Memorial, the Pentagon, and at The Otter Exhibit at the National Zoo. They will donate an estimated \$45,000 in material and labor costs to bring the pool up to operating standards, CEO Mitch Friedlander said.

"We have the ability to rally around certain causes," Friedlander said. "It's a great opportunity for us to reach out and do some great things that can be of real help to the community and the kids."

Friedlander has pledged a continual pro bono commitment to Asbury Park's Boys and Girls Club beyond the pool [shown at right] resurfing and equipment upgrades.



"The emotional side of this is really quite impactful," Friedlander said "It's about helping to change the lives of these kids, who are really just great kids. It's nice to be able to do something for people. I'm really quite appreciative and glad that I've been given the opportunity to be a part of it."