

Idaho Falls sets the pace with mixed-use development at Snake River Landing

By: Teya Vitu March 25, 2016 0



901 Pier View Drive and 900 Pier View Drive are the premium office buildings at Snake River Landing. The large mixed-use development includes offices, single-family homes, an apartment complex, and a pier that juts into the river. Photo by Pete Grady

Idaho's largest, most diverse mixed-use development may well be across the river from historic downtown Idaho Falls.

Snake River Landing in the past 15 years has converted a former gravel pit with some 300,000 square feet of Class A office/commercial space, a nuclear engineering company, 22 single-family homes so far since 2009-10, an extension of the city's Greenbelt with a pier stretching into the river, and a 228-unit The Falls apartment complex that started construction in October and will be completed in summer.

Snake River Landing is just getting started.

Eastern Idaho's largest developer, Ball Ventures, so far has developed just 40 acres of the 450 acres that Allen Ball assembled in 2001 without a specific game plan. Mixed-use development emerged toward the middle of the decade with the first structures in place in 2007.

Another 300,000 square feet of office/commercial development is anticipated in coming decades along the development's Pier View Drive, which is where the first wave of offices are clustered. As many as 1,800 to 2,200 single-family homes, townhomes, condos and apartment units could ultimately sit in what has become prime real estate wedged between the Snake River and Interstate 15 running from the mile-and-a-half from Pancheri Drive and Sunnyside Road.

"We definitely want to be a higher density with 16 units per acre," said Eric Isom, chief development officer at Ball Ventures.

Ball Ventures offered to donate 23 acres near the freeway to the Idaho Falls Auditorium District, which is exploring building a 4,500-seat events center and possibly bringing a professional hockey team to Idaho Falls. The district has issued a request for proposals for developer suggestions for an events center.

Ball Ventures also has considered building a shopping center on 65 acres at the southern edge of Snake River Landing. The company has earmarked 30 acres for office, 100 acres for residential, and 100 acres for retail, but market forces in future years could lead to revisions.

Just across the Pancheri street from Snake River Landing is the 15-acre Taylor Crossing, a set of six 18th century Georgian-style Class A office buildings, a 108-room Marriott Residence Inn, a Zions Bank, a Citizens Community Bank and plans for more than 100 condominium and townhome units.

McNeil Development, owned by brothers Rollie and Lorin Walker, built Taylor Crossing between 2003 and 2013. Construction is expected to start in March on a 124-room Marriott Spring Hill Suites.

Together, both essentially are an extension of downtown Idaho Falls. Broadway is the south edge of the historic downtown and north edge of Taylor Crossing across the river.



Eric Isom oversees the development of Snake River Landing, which is considered the largest, most diverse mixed-use development in Idaho. Photo by Pete Grady

This spring, Idaho Business Review publishes its third edition of Square Feet, a quarterly magazine dedicated to commercial and residential design, construction and real estate. The April issue focuses on mixed-use development. This story also appears in the print edition of Square Feet, included with the April 15 edition of the IBR.

These best business addresses in eastern Idaho today are on real estate that wasn't even considered real estate as recently as the late 20th century. On the map, one can't but wonder how hundreds of acres between the river and the freeway right by downtown could remain undeveloped into the 21st century.

But Idaho Falls historically grew eastward, away from the downtown, the Snake River and, later, I-15, all at the west edge of the city. On top of that, the land between the freeway and river was especially unappealing with lava rock close to the surface and a gravel pit.



Brothers Bryan Wilson (left) and Brent Wilson are at Mountain West Commercial Real Estate. Brent Wilson is a leading broker in eastern Idaho. Photo by Pete Grady.

Allen Ball at Ball Ventures and the Walker brothers – all eastern Idaho natives – had similar motivations of giving back to their community by developing land that had never attracted developers.

"They were looking at a brownfield," said Dave Strobel, vice president of sales and marketing at McNeil Development, about the Walkers. "They wanted to beautify the city."

Ball Ventures first built 900 and 901 Pier View Drive, tall, two-story office buildings that come upon the namesake pier into the river. They offer 40,000 and 50,000 square feet on a street that interprets an old main street with different façade treatments of brick, stucco and stone.

"We think it's the prime location for the resurgence of the growth of the west side of town," Isom said. "It was a desire to do something different that nobody has done before (in Idaho Falls). These are the kinds of projects that are common in many other cities but we didn't have it."

Others think so, too. Ball Ventures opened its own office in 901 Pier View in 2007. Two years later, U.S. Sen. James Risch moved his Idaho Falls office to down the hall from Ball. The newly established two-county joint economic development entity, Regional Economic Development Eastern Idaho, or REDI, set up shop last year in the same building. The prominent local law firm of Moffatt Thomas brought its offices from downtown in 2012 into the twin building 900 Pier View across the street.

"I think the great businesses that are here – that was part of it," said Lee Radford, a partner at Moffatt Thomas. "I consider this part of downtown."

Jan Rogers moved to Idaho Falls from Twin Falls, where in her 14 years with Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization, or SIEDO, she put the city on the national food industry map.

"For Idaho Falls, this is an amazing development," said Rogers, who is originally from Dallas. "Even in Dallas, this kind of mixed-use, on the river, with the mountains, we'd be thrilled to death to be here."

Even at only 10 percent build-out, Snake River Landing has drawn about 40 businesses employing about 900 people and a total investment of about \$100 million by Ball and other developers. This includes a division of Curtiss-Wright, a nuclear engineering company with a 112,000-square-foot structure.

The extended stay Home2 Suites by Hilton opened with 91 rooms in September.

"In my opinion, there is a lot of immigration to Idaho Falls," Isom said. "A lot of people coming from other places are used to seeing these kinds of places. Urban places are more in demand. Younger people, that's the last thing they want, to be living seven miles out there."

Eventually, talk about mixed-use development in general and Snake River Landing, specifically, revolves around the millennial generation born from about 1980 to 2000 and the Idaho National Laboratory, which is transforming Idaho Falls into a center for spinoff technology companies.

"They are recruiting workforce from across the country," said Michelle Holt, chief executive of the Greater Idaho Falls Chamber of Commerce. "This needs to be a community where they want to live. This helps drive it."

Holt considers Snake River Landing the city's first traditional mixed-use development.



Greater Idaho Falls Chamber of Commerce CEO Michelle Holt patronized chamber member Kool Beanz Cafe at Snake River Landing. Photo by Pete Grady.

"Idaho Falls was an agricultural town," she said. "That was a big departure for Idaho Falls."

There is no events center yet, but frequently in summer Snake River Landing picks an undeveloped plot to stage concerts, bike rides, races and a number of other events put on by nonprofits.

"Snake River Landing has a significant impact," said Brent Wilson, a broker at the newly opened Idaho office of Thornton Oliver Keller Commercial Real Estate who lands many of the local large commercial real estate deals. "The true impact won't be felt for another five years. The events center will be huge. One of the things they have down really well is they do larger scale, turn-key for larger companies."

Wilson is working with a California developer to bring a 37-acre mixed-use project to neighboring Ammon with 12 acres of office and flex-tech space mixing office and warehouse space and 25 acres of residential with a mix of single-family and multi-family offerings. Groundbreaking is anticipated in 2017.

The Idaho Falls Redevelopment Agency also has mixed-use in mind for the redevelopment of the 1927 Bonneville Hotel, for which a request for developer proposals was issued Feb. 7. The agency envisions commercial on the ground floor, affordable housing on the lower floors and market-rate units on the upper floors of the five-story structure, said Renee Magee, who recently stepped down as the agency's executive director.

Idaho Falls Mayor Rebecca Casper worked on water rights with Ball Ventures about 15 years ago, long before she was elected. She believes Snake River Valley has raised the bar for other developers with ripple effects apparent with design improvement around town, she said.

"I love the idea of people here being able to walk to work, walk to the park," Casper said. "I remember watching the TV show 'Family Affair' when I was a kid. The kids in that show always walked to to the park. The idea Idaho Falls residents can walk to the park, walk to the store, walk to work, is really appealing. The upcoming generation will pick mixed use."

Snake River Landing attracts attention in Boise, too, where locals measure the Idaho Falls development against Harris Ranch in southeast Boise and Hidden Springs, a 1,844-acre master planned community in northeast Boise.

"To the best of our knowledge, Snake River Landing is the largest mixed-use development in Idaho. We are not aware of another project of that total size in our area," said George Iliff, managing owner at Colliers International in Boise. He later hedged his thoughts with comparisons to Harris Ranch, a 1,300-acre master planned community in southeast Boise that "embraces the concepts of Smart Growth and New Urbanism."



Idaho Falls City Council President Thomas Hally (center) and Mayor Rebecca Casper are strong proponents of mixed-use development. Photo by Pete Grady.

Scot Oliver, executive director at Idaho Smart Growth, doesn't equate the Boise and Idaho Falls development.

"Harris Ranch and Hidden Springs are larger, and are mixed-use, but with nowhere near the diversity of products and scales," Oliver said. "Snake River certainly has a greater mix, and does count as infill by proxy (reclaimed brownfield/industrial park, etc.) even though it's being developed ground-up as if it were greenfield."

Note: This article was updated at 9:15 a.m. on March 25.

Snake River Landing tenants and the years they opened

2007Ball VenturesGL Voigt DevelopmentPotandon Produce

Eagle Cap Executive Suites

2008

Primary Health *Current DBA Pacific Source

Wells Fargo

Snake River Landing Discovery Center

2009

Teton Toyota

Senator James Risch

Stifel Nicolaus

2010

BBSI

The Buckner Company

Buffalo Wild Wings

Love at First Bite

Liberty Mutual

2011

Carey Perkins

Rabo AgriFinance

Stevens-Henager College

Stockman's Restaurant

2012

Adult and Child Development Center

Moffatt Thomas

Northpoint CPA

Super Fly Fitness

Love at First Bite – Expansion

2013

Boise Office Equipment

Larsen Farms

Bill's Bike Shop

Galusha, Higgins & Galusha *Current DBA Wipfli

Bandon River Apartments

Teton Volkswagen

Horrocks Engineers

Mackenzie River Pizza Pub & Grill

2014

Curtiss-Wright Flow Control Sciencetech

Edward Jones Investments

Intel Security

2015

Northwest Farm Credit

Kool Beanz Café

Home2 Suites by Hilton

REDI

First American Title Co

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Teya Vitu is an Idaho Business Review reporter, covering commercial real estate, construction, transportation and whatever else may intrigue him in the moment.

