

Fifteen Years of Rebuilding the World Trade Center



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September 11, 2001 stands in history as one of the most tragic days this country has ever known. And nowhere was that tragedy felt more keenly than in New York City, where a senseless act of terrorism claimed the lives of thousands of innocent people and forever altered the city skyline. On that day, all 7 of the original World Trade Center buildings were destroyed, and over 12 million square feet of office space was converted to rubble. Fifteen years later, Ground Zero has undergone a transformation, and vitality and progress honor the memory of those who were taken.

Last May at Cornell's Titans of New York Real Estate event, Larry Silverstein, Chairman of Silverstein Properties, shared with Baker students and guests what his feelings were following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Just seven weeks prior, Silverstein had accomplished a lifelong dream when he acquired control of the World Trade Center (WTC), signing a 99-year ground lease from the NY Port Authority. He shared the plans he and his wife had made for a peaceful Mediterranean vacation, and how after witnessing the events of that fateful day, they both knew how critical it was for the city to begin immediately to rebuild. That journey has continued for the past 15 years, and has become one of the most complex development projects in this history of the city.

Clean up of the site was completed in May of 2002, with over 1 million tons of concrete and steel removed. The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation was formed to oversee the reconstruction of Lower Manhattan, and in 2003, they selected the design of Polish Architect Daniel Libeskind to be the vision for the new WTC. The design called for a descending spiral of buildings, starting at 1 WTC and ending at the footprints of the fallen Twin Towers.

Throughout 2003 and 2004, architects were selected to design the many buildings that would bring Libeskind's vision to life. Santiago Calatrava was chosen for the new transit hub, and architects Michael Arad and Peter Walker were tasked with designing the 9/11 memorial. The new towers of the World Trade Center would be designed by a "who's who" of the world's finest architects. David Childs of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill would design 1 WTC, Lord Norman Foster would design 2 WTC, Richard Rogers would design 3 WTC, and 4 WTC would be designed by Fumihiko Maki.

Over the next several years, the WTC site was a flurry of construction activity. Work had begun on 7 WTC as early as 2002, and in 2005 construction began on Calatrava's transit

center, which sits between 2 and 3 WTC. In 2006, work began on the museum and memorial, and in April of that year, ground was broken for 1 WTC, known at the time as the "Freedom Tower". Construction for all of these projects was a long and tedious process. Extensive work had to be completed below ground, well below sea-level and just yards away from the Hudson River. At one point, the discovery of the hull of an 18th century sailing ship caused more delay. Construction crews faced the added complexity of continuously working around an active subway line.

As the years passed, the new World Trade Center began to take form. In 2006, the 52 story 7 WTC opened, and became New York City's first LEED certified office building. The 9/11 Memorial and Museum were dedicated on September 11, 2011, commemorating the 10-year anniversary of the attacks. In 2013, 4 WTC opened and became the first building completed on the original WTC site. A year later, 1 WTC was completed at an incredible 1,776 feet tall. Construction on 3 WTC had been stalled in the wake of the Great Recession, but began again in earnest in 2014. The building topped out in June of this year and completion is expected in early 2018.

The tower at 2 WTC has followed a more complicated road, with a complete redesign occurring in 2015. Foster's original plan was replaced with a design from Danish architect Bjarke Ingles, a design custom made for expected anchor tenants News Corp and 21st Century Fox. However, in early 2016 the tenants backed out of their relocation plans, and the fate of 2 WTC is still yet to be determined.

In March of 2016, the World Trade Center Transportation Hub officially opened after years of delays and budget overruns. The Westfield World Trade Center retail mall located within the transit hub opened last month, introducing over 360,000 square feet of new retail into Lower Manhattan. And just two days ago, plans for the new Performing Arts Center were revealed, with an expected completion in 2020. The center will sit between 1 and 2 WTC and is expected to invigorate the cultural landscape of Lower Manhattan.

Though much remains to be done to complete the redevelopment of the World Trade Center, the vision and determination of countless men and women have breathed new life into the area. Their dedication over the last 15 years has created an inspiring legacy of strength and progress. As we take time to honor those who were lost on that tragic day 15 years ago, we may also take a moment to honor those who remained behind to rebuild.

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