



Comeback City

On the path to recovery, Detroit expands the visitor experience. BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

MOTOR CITY:
Downtown Detroit GM
Headquarters

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The Riverwalk, a new ribbon of parks, paved paths and public art, runs along the Detroit River east of the Renaissance Center.

MORE THAN \$11 BILLION in development projects continue to transform America's largest major city to declare bankruptcy. New and rehabbed buildings in downtown Detroit are adding hotels, meeting spaces and dining and entertainment venues.

And the pace of revitalization shows no sign of slowing.

"If you swing a hammer in this town, you're going to be busy for a while," said Mark Denson, director of business development, Detroit Economic Growth Corp. The nonprofit works with the city and other partners to foster development. Strong planning and the continuity of leadership — business, civic, philanthropic — "have bought into this way forward for Detroit," he said. "We

have all the major stakeholders rowing in the same direction."

Cobo Center, the 17th-largest convention center in the United States, completed a nearly \$300 million expansion last year, said Denson. "Cobo was designed to hold about 95 percent of all North American conferences and trade shows."

A \$627 million arena opens this fall connecting downtown with the Midtown neighborhood and business district. Little Caesars Arena, backed by Ilitch Holdings of the pizza chain, will seat more than 20,000 for Red Wings hockey and Detroit Pistons basketball as well as provide space for concerts and other entertainment. The 50-block District Detroit development also will add a 350-room athlete hotel, residential units, shops, restaurants and a plaza rivaling Rockefeller Center in size with a below-ground community ice rink.

Dan Gilbert, founder, Quicken Loans, purchased more than 95 Detroit properties through his commercial real estate company. Among them, the Albert Kahn-designed building once occupied by Detroit's daily newspapers has been re-imagined as an office building housing Quicken employees and the Michigan regional office of Molina Healthcare. A ground-up mixed-use development, 28Grand, brings the growing micro-loft trend to Detroit. The 218 furnished apartments, 85 for residents qualifying for low-income credits, are set to lease this year in a 13-story building in the heart

GREEN AND CLEAN:
The new Riverwalk winds through Milliken State Park and Harbor, a 31-acre green oasis in downtown Detroit (above), and the QLINE light rail streetcar began running in May (left).

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SCENIC DRIVES

The nation's largest city-owned island park lies in the Detroit River with views of Windsor, Ontario, on one side and the Detroit skyline on the other. Belle Isle, now leased to the state, was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and covers 982 acres, larger than Olmsted's Central Park in New York City. Motorists enter by bridge and make stops at a carillon, fountain and all-marble lighthouse dating from the 1920s and 1930s. Maritime history unfolds at a Great Lakes museum. Visitors encounter wildlife, fish and tropical plants at a nature zoo, aquarium and conservatory. Golfers can hone their skills at a driving range.

About 20 miles northwest of downtown Detroit, Bloomfield Hills ranks among its wealthiest suburbs, with mansions tucked among rolling hills and winding roads. Philanthropists founded Cranbrook here in 1904. The 319-acre campus comprises museums devoted to art and science, a house and gardens and a prep school. Visitors see the work of Eliel Saarinen, Albert Kahn and Carl Milles, among others. A few miles southwest, the small town of Franklin is a walk back in time. Founded in 1825, its 19th-century buildings include a cider mill, especially popular with fall visitors who come for apple cider and hot doughnuts.



of downtown. Gilbert will capitalize on another trend, lifestyle brand hotels, with the construction of a 130-room boutique hotel associated with the Detroit-based watch and luxury goods company Shinola. The eight-story building, originally a hardware store, is scheduled to open next year as The Shinola Hotel and will connect to an activated alleyway with shops and restaurants.

More than 100 bars and restaurants opened in Detroit since its 2013 bankruptcy, averaging about one a week, and hotel occupancy has hit record levels.

At least five hotels are currently under construction, with more anticipated, said Denson, and businesses “from tech startups to Fortune 200 companies” are opening downtown, among them Ally Financial and Microsoft, which plans to relocate from the suburbs next year.

Workers wishing to move downtown might be put on waiting lists for condos and apartments.

Gilbert's plans for development of the site of the former Hudson's department store will alleviate some of the downtown housing shortage with 250 residential units. It will be Michigan's tallest building, rising 7 feet above Detroit's Renaissance Center, headquarters of General Motors. Groundbreaking may begin at the end of the year. Gilbert envisions an architectural icon fitting for the only U.S. city designated a UNESCO City of Design. The residential tower will punctuate the skyline as it sits atop a nine-story podium. Plans call for these lower levels to contain meeting space, offices, tech and cultural space, retail and a public market.

Low-rise housing will take shape in five housing types in the City Modern development Gilbert plans in the Brush Park neighborhood between Midtown and downtown, not far from the Little Caesars Arena. In a blend of old and new, four Victorian mansions renovated as seven historic home units will be joined by modern apartments, townhomes, carriage homes and duplexes for a total



of 410 residences, 54 qualifying for low-income credits. Pocket parks and ground-floor retail will create a walkable neighborhood that Denson likens to Washington, D.C.'s Georgetown.

The QLINE streetcar system began running in May, transporting residents and visitors alike between downtown and Midtown, where some of the city's new restaurants and retailers — including the flagship Shinola store — opened. The 3.3 miles of rail along Woodward Avenue, the city's main thoroughfare, provides better access not only to the new hockey and basketball arena but also to baseball in Comerica Park and football at Ford Field. It passes Fox Theatre, a 1920s landmark and part of the nation's largest theater district outside Manhattan.

The seeds of downtown development were planted in the 1990s as Detroit prepared to host the 2006 Super Bowl, said Denson. Stalled during the recession, it's made a comeback. “Detroit is on a positive trajectory” with lots of activity planned in the next five to seven years, he said. “The goal is to be a better Detroit tomorrow than we are today, and I think we are making great strides.”