

# The Columbus Dispatch

» Hot Links:

## Arena District a blueprint for other cities' development

**ARENA DISTRICT BY THE NUMBERS**

11 million	4.5 million	8 million	15 million	17 million	15 million
Cost of arena	Cost of arena	Cost of arena	Cost of arena	Cost of arena	Cost of arena

View Larger

By **Mark Williams**

*The Columbus Dispatch* • Sunday October 18, 2015 8:10 AM

60

86

219

### HELPFUL LINKS

- » Corrections
- » Lottery
- » Obituaries
- » Weather

### HEADLINES FROM THISWEEKNEWS.COM

- » Planning commission approves new Huntington Bank
- » Business owner trying to make some noise about sound wall

### THE CITY BLOG

- » New report shows Americans sacrifice to pay for housing

### LOCAL STORIES FROM THISWEEK

- » Grandview police arrest Hilliard man for robbery
- » District asks students, teachers to take precautions against pertussis
- » Surveillance photos released of possible Dublin 'grabber'
- » Grandview police issue arrest warrant for aggravated robbery suspect
- » Gahanna council eyes incentive for Grote Co.
- » 'Sweet Tooth Swindler' dubbed latest fugitive of the week

### MORE ARTICLES

It was an unusual strategy at the time: Build an arena in a beat-up area of downtown, with plans to surround it with office buildings, restaurants, entertainment venues and apartments, in hopes of turning it around.

Now 15 years after the first puck was dropped at Nationwide Arena, the strategy not only succeeded, but it also has become a blueprint for development in a growing number of other cities.

Politicians and development officials from cities throughout North America have visited the Arena District, taking ideas back home that are now being deployed.

Officials from Detroit; Milwaukee; Edmonton, Alberta; Sacramento, Calif.; and Pittsburgh have been among those who have come to the Arena District, according to the district's developer, Nationwide Realty Investors.

"How do we replicate this?" That's what people are asking," said Mark Rosentraub, professor of sport management at the University of Michigan, who has studied the development of arenas and stadiums. "Some of those people thought it couldn't happen."

In Pittsburgh, the Penguins of the NHL are developing a 28-acre site near the \$321 million Consol Energy Center that opened in 2010. The site is the former Civic Arena where the Penguins used to play.

Designs of the project look similar to what has happened in the Arena District, with plans for a mixed-use development that will restore historic connections, bridging the Uptown and Hill District neighborhoods with downtown Pittsburgh.

"We sat down and talked with them several times about what they have done relative to development," Penguins COO Travis Williams told the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* last year.

"We have lots of tours of the arena (and) tours of the Arena District," said Brian Ellis, Nationwide Realty's president.

When Milwaukee officials released plans in April for a new arena for the NBA's Bucks and a corresponding entertainment district, they cited Columbus as an example of the kind of project they wanted, according to media accounts.

"We're not just trying to build a new home for the Milwaukee Bucks but create a 365-day attraction for Wisconsin residents that will help revitalize downtown Milwaukee," Bucks President Peter Feigin said.



REQUEST TO BUY THIS PHOTO  
JONATHAN QUILTER | DISPATCH

Columbus' Arena District features an uncommon mix — sports venues, entertainment, offices and homes.

Also like the Arena District, the conceptual drawings show plans for an ambitious development that melds sports, entertainment, residential and office use.

Before Nationwide Arena, Columbus was the largest city in the U.S. without a multipurpose arena.

One thing Nationwide Realty did that was different was to design a master plan for development that would surround the arena. Another key difference was designing the project in an urban area, when many arena and stadium projects were being planned for suburbs.

Though the Arena District was officially formed in 1997, it really came to life when the Blue Jackets started playing in 2000. The arena and the surrounding area got good reviews, and within a couple of seasons, Nationwide Realty found itself as a tour guide for out-of-towners wanting to learn more.

While the notion of integrating an arena or stadium with the surrounding neighborhood has worked for Columbus, Ellis said, he routinely tells visitors that trying to copy what has been done here might not work the same way in other cities.

“We tell them it’s very market-specific. It’s not a formula,” Ellis said. “The Columbus Arena District is not really replicable. To think that it could be is a big mistake.”

When Nationwide Arena was being planned, developers visited seven arenas with the idea of taking the best ideas from those projects. Instead, developers came back with the notion that something different was in order, something that would be unique to Columbus.

Before the development of the Arena District, it was more common for arenas and stadiums to be built in areas isolated from other parts of town, often surrounded by parking lots. The notion was that if a stadium or arena was built, development would follow.

Instead, a University of Michigan study found such development did little for economic development in the region because of that isolation.

Arena District developers decided that their plan for the arena would be to integrate the surrounding 75 acres that had been the old Ohio Penitentiary site. It would include new and old buildings with city streets, sidewalks and public gathering places.

The result has been a \$1 billion investment, most of which came from private sources, that includes Nationwide Arena, Huntington Park for the Clippers, 2 million square feet of commercial space, more than 2,000 hotel rooms and nearly 900 condos and apartments.

Early on, Ellis said, developers quickly wanted to add office space to create traction and sustain the restaurants. That was followed by apartments and condos.

“We’ve been working for 15 years to try and create a high level of energy, a 24/7 neighborhood that’s always active. ... That’s a challenge,” he said.

More projects are in the works for the district as development continues to stretch west toward the Scioto River. Nationwide Realty has plans to develop the 25-acre former Jaeger Machine Co. manufacturing site that was initially proposed as the location for Hollywood Casino Columbus.

While there had been similar developments in San Diego around Petco Field and in Los Angeles with the Staples Center, the Arena District is important because Columbus is smaller, Rosentraub said.

“The notion that sports could be an anchor was an idea that some scoffed at,” he said. “Now, it’s the Bible.”

It stands in contrast to what happened with the old City Center mall project Downtown that was eventually demolished.

“Columbus is an important example in many ways because of what the city tried to realize with Downtown,” he said. “The mall project was a complete disaster.”

Beyond redeveloping an area that had been in decline, the Arena District has had other positive results, Rosentraub said.

“The Arena District has effectively accomplished what the city hoped for in the 1990s — a link between the urban core and Ohio State University,” he said.

Rosentraub said he has urged executives from cities such as Detroit; Tampa, Fla.; and Edmonton to check out the Arena District.

“Give Columbus credit,” Rosentraub said. “They took a look at what was going on to make the case you could do it here in a smaller market.”

mawilliams@dispatch.com

@BizMarkWilliams

---

Favorite   Print Story

4

---