



# DOWNTOWN

# HEIGHTS

## Skyline Projects Propel Fort Wayne

“We have to be bold.”

It’s a powerful economic development strategy espoused by Ash Brokerage CEO Tim Ash.

He’s bringing his vision to life with Ash Skyline Plaza, a nine-story, \$100 million landmark addition housing retailers, commercial occupants and the approximately 1,100-space Skyline Garage in downtown Fort Wayne.

“The concept I had with this building was, ‘How could we bring a suburban element to an urban environment?’” Ash shares. “The way we looked at it was, people that do unique designs and buildings that are in suburban areas are isolating themselves in those surroundings – which is fine. What makes us different is that we wanted to make the downtown our campus, so to speak.

“I think it’s important for our people to not have to get in their cars and drive to have something to eat or to do something; they’re a walk away from doing a lot of different things.”

An adjacent structure, the \$40 million Skyline Tower, will feature retail and office space, as well as 124 high-end apartments.

Brad Toothaker, managing partner at Great Lakes Capital (GLC), is excited about the private equity and development firm’s role in making Skyline Tower a reality.

“Skyline Tower truly moves (forward) the need for urban density, live/work/play options and the

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

placemaking that allows for talent retention and recruitment – not only for the city of Fort Wayne, but for the region,” he contends.

Ash Skyline Plaza, Skyline Tower and Skyline Garage (three separate entities; two structures) encompass transformative downtown revitalization efforts. The garage, which opened in May, acts as the base. It’s integrated with the plaza, and will stand next to and attached to the under-construction tower.

“In Northeast Indiana and in Indiana in general, we have to be bold,” Ash emphasizes. “That’s what we did here, was to make a statement that we need to attract talent, retain talent and have people that are growing up here want to stay here.”

### ‘Up on the roof’

Luminous shades of orange, blue and green bathe Ash Skyline Plaza’s top three floors, which serve as Ash Brokerage’s national headquarters. An open layout, coffee bars, elegant furnishings, cafeteria and meeting spaces are among the accommodations that set a relaxed, but refined tone for its 265 local employees.

Norma Endersby, brand marketing director of creative services, is clearly pumped about the company’s new digs.

“It’s really inspirational,” she affirms.

Take in, for instance, the view. Make that “views.”

“Fifty feet is the farthest distance that anyone is from a window,” Endersby reveals proudly.

Ash Brokerage sits atop the city-owned Skyline Garage, which is accessible to the public. But its rooftop will offer something exclusive: a one-acre, private green space (Skyline Park) for Ash Skyline Plaza employees as well as Skyline Tower workers and residents. At press time, construction was slated for completion in mid-June.

“It’s going to have a lot of green grass, sidewalks and outside seating areas,” explains Larry Weigand, president of Weigand Construction. “It’s going to have quite a great vibe and feel for outdoor activity and outdoor meeting space.”

GLC is partnering on the development and ongoing maintenance of the green space.

“It’s pretty awesome!” Toothaker declares. “It will be places to have entertainment, barbecues, picnics, walking, running, exercising, yoga and whatever you want to do outside. It will be a mini-park basically. Literally, several hundred people will be able to utilize that space.”

### Food for thought

Life is sweet at DeBrand Fine Chocolates.

Cathy Brand-Beere, president and founder, grew up in the world of confectionary arts. She began working alongside family members at age eight and founded DeBrand Fine Chocolates in 1987.

She emphasizes that customers are invited to treat themselves to not only gourmet chocolate, but also a pleasant, inviting experience in the street-level space.

“We’re trying to provide not just chocolates that could compete anywhere in the world,” Brand-Beere comments, “but the type of chocolates you want in a very warm, inviting comfortable environment to enjoy them.”



Ash Skyline Plaza takes shape. The development is home to street-level retailers, commercial occupants and Ash Brokerage’s national corporate headquarters. Above the parking garage lies rooftop green space with entertainment and exercise amenities.

She's thrilled about the store's proximity to the Grand Wayne Convention Center, downtown hotels, area restaurants and fellow tenants at Ash Skyline Plaza.

"There's going to be a great synergy between us – the people who work in the offices, (the other retailers) and the YMCA next door. People can work out and reward themselves, go back and work out and then come back and reward themselves," Brand-Beere jokes. "We'll have a never-ending cycle between the Y customers and ours."

Weigand points out that thanks to DeBrand and the other tenants (see sidebar), there's no vacancy within Ash Skyline Plaza.

"That in itself is a big win for downtown, and a big win for the development itself," he contends.

### 'Live, work, play'

Skyline Tower will bring a suburban flair to downtown Fort Wayne. The 170,000-square-foot structure will boast 12 stories (10 will be devoted to apartments). Construction on the residential portion is slated to begin this summer, with full occupancy expected in about two years.

Ruth's Chris Steakhouse and Another Broken Egg will delight diners on the ground floor, while GLC and the affiliated Bradley Company (Toothaker is CEO) will employ approximately 70 on the second floor (in addition to an undisclosed occupant).

Weigand believes projects like Skyline Tower are "a continuation of the positive momentum we've seen for our downtown."

In May, it was announced that Skyline Tower would receive \$2.8 million through the Regional Cities Initiative. It's the first recipient of Regional Cities funding in Northeast Indiana.

### High hopes

Although the unique trio – Ash Skyline Plaza, Ash Skyline Tower and Skyline Garage – is one of a kind, Weigand foresees the innovative approach taken to build them as a sign of things to come.

Ticking off the number of jobs the projects are creating, he stresses, "You could look at 400 to 500 employees coming downtown every day. Think about the economic impact of that, what it means for the downtown community and how we can leverage the success of having more folks downtown and hopefully bring more projects."

"Somebody had to be out in front in creating the market for this type of space, and the vision that Tim (Ash) had has really paid off. We're hoping that this isn't the first and last. We're hoping this is the first of many developments like this that create a vibrant downtown."



DeBrand Fine Chocolates' Ash Skyline Plaza store marks its fourth Fort Wayne location. Customers savor snacks in an "urban chic" environment resplendent with concrete columns, an open ceiling and elegant woods.



### Sky's the Limit

Spanning 65,000 square feet, Ash Skyline Plaza is the new home for a variety of businesses:

#### Retailers (all are open)

- DeBrand Fine Chocolates
- The Find boutique
- The Golden restaurant
- Lake City Bank
- Skyline YMCA

#### Commercial tenants (both will move in this summer)

- Barnes & Thornburg LLP
- DuCharme, McMillen & Associates, Inc., a North American tax consulting firm

**RESOURCES:** Tim Ash and Norma Endersby, Ash Brokerage, at [www.ashbrokerage.com](http://www.ashbrokerage.com) | Cathy Brand-Beere, DeBrand Fine Chocolates, at [www.debrand.com](http://www.debrand.com) | Brad Toothaker, Great Lakes Capital, at [www.greatlakescapital.com](http://www.greatlakescapital.com) | Larry Weigand, Weigand Construction, at [www.weigandconstruction.com](http://www.weigandconstruction.com)