

Roxbury Group hitting its development stride



By John Gallagher, Detroit Free Press 11:07 p.m. EST January 24, 2015

The Detroit-based Roxbury Group development firm is on a roll, with the Professional Plaza project, the David Whitney Building, and the state DNR Outdoor Adventure Center to its credit.



Reading the headlines, one might conclude that the Ilitch family and Quicken Loans founder and Chairman Dan Gilbert are doing all of the new development in greater downtown Detroit.

But other developers are working those same fields, and one in particular, the Detroit-based Roxbury Group, is on a roll now. It has just reopened the classic David Whitney Building near Grand Circus Park as an Aloft Hotel, with a restaurant and residential apartments to follow shortly.

(Photo: Detroit Free Press)

Then, too, Roxbury's adaptive reuse of the old Detroit Dry Dock (Globe Trading) building on the east riverfront is getting the finishing touches as a Michigan Department of Natural Resources Outdoor Adventure Center will

open this year.

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A view of the Globe Trading Company building off of Atwater in downtown Detroit. *(Photo: Ryan Garza Detroit Free Press)*

And just last week Roxbury announced that it will transform the vacant 12-story Professional Plaza tower in Midtown Detroit into apartments and ground-floor commercial space. Roxbury is also developing the Griswold, a residential project to be built atop the parking garage next door to the Westin Book Cadillac.

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The Professional Plaza building, 3800 Woodward, also known as the Hammer and Nail building for the iconic neon sign atop the building. (Photo: Detroit Free Press)

In all, Roxbury projects are in line to add more than 300 residential apartments to the greater downtown market, along with a roster of retail and restaurant spaces plus the hotel and the DNR center.

"The sorts of projects that interest us are the projects like the Plaza or the David Whitney where we can combine uses and create a whole experience inside a building," David DiRita, a principal of Roxbury, said last week. "We're not interested in just the unit count inside the building. We really like projects that transform a building or a block or a neighborhood, so those are things that attract us."

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Roxbury has just reopened the classic David Whitney Building near Grand Circus Park as an Aloft Hotel, with a restaurant and residential apartments to follow shortly. (Photo: Detroit Free Press)

A lawyer and former corporate counsel for Tower Automotive, DiRita started Roxbury in 2005 with another corporate attorney, Stacy Fox, who more recently assisted Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr operate the city during bankruptcy. The young firm was gearing up to build new developments just as the Great Recession and real estate crash loomed on the horizon.

The result: Roxbury's first big project, to build residential units atop the parking garage next to the Westin Book Cadillac, never happened. They've since restarted that project as the Griswold.

The partners spent the recession years doing consulting work. They helped to move United Way for Southeastern Michigan into new quarters in the First National Building and helped the Detroit Economic Growth Corp. assemble a set of older buildings for the redevelopment of the Capitol Park district.

As the economy improved, Roxbury began to hit its stride. Its mixed-use retail and residential project, the Auburn, in Midtown came on line in 2012, the David Whitney at the end of 2014, and the DNR center will open later this year. The Plaza and the Griswold should both open in late 2016 or so.

There will be more projects beyond those, DiRita promises, although nothing he's willing to talk about publicly yet.

Nor is DiRita worried about competition from other developers. There is such demand in the greater downtown that he quips, "There ought to be 10 Roxbury Groups doing this stuff right now."

Contact John Gallagher: 313-222-5173 or gallagher@freepress.com. Follow him on Twitter [@jgallagherfreep](https://twitter.com/jgallagherfreep).

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