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WORLD MARKET CENTER LAS VEGAS: Furnishing a Better Future

ROBERT MARICICH PLANS FOR GREATER APPEAL OF GROWING DOWNTOWN FACILITY

By Hali Bernstein Saylor

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There is a bright future on the horizon for World Market Center Las Vegas, and it rests comfortably and securely in the hands of Robert Maricich.

Maricich, who was named president and chief executive officer of the home-furnishings trade-show campus in January, has plans for continued expansion of the 57-acre parcel in downtown Las Vegas, adding a greater variety of exhibitors and a drive to appeal more to those in the hospitality arena.

First and figuring most prominently on his agenda is the upcoming summer market, which begins July 28 and also marks the opening of the campus' third building.

This will be the first time all exhibitors will be housed on the same campus. Maricich said the proximity of the showrooms to each other - versus being spread across nearly 200 buildings such as in High Point, N.C., - makes attending the Las Vegas event "effective and efficient. In three days, you can get more work done than in 10 days at the other trade shows."

Even with the industry in turmoil because of the unstable housing market and the city's three-digit summer temperatures, Maricich and his team are doing everything they can to encourage people to come to the summer event.

"You have to put things in context. If you want to stay on top of the market and see what's new, you have to come back to Las Vegas in July," he said. "We made a commitment 90 days ago to pull out all the stops to get buyers here."

Larry Cruikshank/Community Publications



Robert Maricich, president and chief executive officer of World Market Center Las Vegas, has his sights clearly set for the future of the downtown facility for the furnishings industry.

One of those stops is the grand-opening celebration for Building C, which includes a private concert by Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member and Grammy Award-winning artist Rod Stewart.

Maricich, who was admittedly skeptical about the facility's success when he first heard about it, staunchly believes in its future. The new 16-story building, which brings the current exhibition space to more than 5 million square feet, gives the center the "critical mass" it needs to be viable in the industry and helps solidify his faith.

"You can really see how the pieces of the puzzle fit together."

With the support of founders, Jack Kashani and Shawn Samson, along with Ron Wackrow and Michael Brenner of Related Companies, and success of past shows, "if they're (others in the industry) skeptical now, you really have to question their motives. It's amazing how quickly something of this size - the enormity of it, the complexity of it - how it came together."

Once the summer market is complete, Maricich said he plans to focus his attention on increasing the visibility of the Las Vegas Design Center, a year-round center located within the World Market Center.

"No doubt, there has been tremendous success in attracting a main portion of the furniture market. The next step, really, is the design aspect of the furniture business.

"We're attracting the right people in terms of companies exhibiting here to make Las Vegas Design Center more vibrant and recognized as a state-of-the-art design center," he said. "It's an important part of our brand."

Additionally, Maricich wants to cater more to the hospitality industry, which seems like a natural fit considering the large number of hotel rooms in the valley.

"If you are building a hotel, you want to visit Las Vegas and see what others are doing," he said.

Maricich has been watching the industry - from both the residential and hospitality angles - for most of his career.

Prior to joining the team at World Market Center Las Vegas, Maricich spent 11 years with Century Furniture in Hickory, N.C., most recently serving as president and chief executive officer. He helped build the \$175 million company into one of the nation's most admired brands and manufacturers of high-end residential furniture.

Maricich said it was a quirk of fate that originally brought him to the furniture industry.

Unhappy working as an engineer for Texaco, Maricich made a deal with a distant relative who manufactured high-end veneers and custom millwork that he would solve the company's engineering problems in return for a job. That eventually led to his first real job in the furniture industry, as product manager for Flexsteel. He moved through the company's ranks and started its national hospitality sales division.

From there, Maricich moved to American of Martinsville Contract, one of the nation's largest wood furnishings contractors for the hospitality arena, and within three months was named president.

When he finally joined a manufacturer that specialized in residential furnishings, it was during the 1990s, which experienced similar downturns in the home market as today's conditions.

Maricich said he believes that challenge helped prepare him for leading World Market Center Las Vegas in the right direction.

And when combined with the vision of the center's founders, he said it was an opportunity he just couldn't ignore.

"I've seen more changes in the past five years in Las Vegas than I've seen in the last 50 in High Point. You have to change your business model to be successful," he said.

According to Maricich, World Market Center Las Vegas has adapted to the changing needs of the furniture industry and broadened its appeal to a global market.

"It's such a unique and compelling business platform," adding how all aspects of home furnishings blend with furniture within the campus' showrooms.

Maricich is equally positive about his move to Las Vegas.

He and his wife of nearly 36 years, Andrea, have become empty nesters, "which makes moving to Las Vegas exciting. It's a good place for family to visit and it's one of the easiest places to get to other places from," he said. In addition, the move puts the life-long fly fisherman closer to his native Montana.

The Mariciches have three sons, one of which works in the furniture industry.