

River Towers

1965

River Towers was completed in late 1965 as part of a massive urban renewal project in downtown Minneapolis. The groundbreaking took place in early 1964 with a literal bang, as a gun salute was fired from the top of the IBM Building at Marquette Avenue and South 3rd Street, home of Knutson Companies, the project developer. John A. Pruyn of New York was the architect. Landscaping was designed by Sasaki-Walker and Associates of Massachusetts, and St. Paul-based Ellerbe and Co. was the project electrical and mechanical engineer.

The 1964 groundbreaking was significant. Many thought the day would never come. Delays in condemnation proceedings, obtaining City approval to close some streets, and financing concerns led to multiple construction delays. Many were skeptical that downtown living would be appealing. But the developer was certain there was a market for downtown apartments, particularly with suburban home owners for whom “walk to work” would find appeal, and he stood firm in the desire to build additional towers once the first phase of construction



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**RIVER TOWERS
ADDS A FLOOR
EVERY 4 DAYS**

One floor is being added every four days to the River Towers Apartments in downtown Minneapolis, but the rate might be even faster if there weren't a shortage of construction workers.

This was the word Wednesday from Donald Knutson, who is building the 16 and 26 - story buildings as part of his Gateway Center development.

Knutson said he had even sent appeals to the Iron Range area in Northern Minnesota for carpenters, brick layers and steel workers, but got little response.

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Minneapolis Star,
October 22, 1964

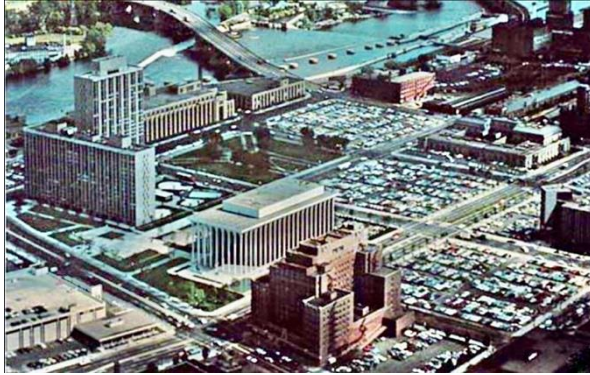
The groundbreaking also marked the beginning of downtown Minneapolis apartment living on a large scale. The two high-rise towers – one at 16 stories and the other at 26 stories – included 512 living units, originally marketed as apartments and converted to condominiums in 1973.

The 26-story building across from the post office was built with one and two-bedroom units, while the shorter building facing Hennepin has units ranging from studios to three bedrooms. Outdoor amenities include a swimming pool and a landscaped patio area built above underground parking. The towers included dedicated laundry services, as well as a barber and beauty shop. Street level commercial spaces facing Hennepin Avenue included a café. Rentals in 1965 started at \$115 to \$300 per month.



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In late May 1965, the Minneapolis Star reported that 100 units had been leased. The shorter building facing Hennepin was completed first, with the taller building facing 1st Street South completed in January 1966.



When completed, the Towers was surrounded by empty parking lots waiting to be developed as part of the Gateway Project. As such, The Towers stood as a self-contained community that included a small grocery store, a beauty shop, newsstand, drycleaner and secretarial service to assist residents with their work. The social scene at the Towers was lively. A community continental breakfast was held every Sunday. Cocktail parties and poolside barbeques were regular events.

In the early hours of August 17, 1970, antiwar demonstrators bombed the side entrance to the Federal Office Building a few blocks away. The explosion shattered many of the lobby windows at The Towers. Residents evacuated their apartments and headed for the building's basement in their pajamas.

In 1973, the Towers transitioned to resident-owned condominiums. The building has been updated to reflect its 1960s midcentury modern appeal.



*Star Tribune
July 25, 2015*

An advertisement for The Towers. At the top left is a circular logo with a stylized building icon and the text "THE TOWERS". To the right of the logo is the slogan "don't let our size fool you!". Below the logo is the phrase "we're big but we're sure easy to live with". A block of smaller text reads: "But you may not get a chance—our apartment homes are going fast—it must be that safe feeling people get, when they move in . . . or maybe it's our prices (studios from \$125). Whatever your reason is come quick—join the movers!". At the bottom, the text says "THE TOWERS", "Open 1-9 daily—335-8713", and "Park in the garage just off Marquette Ave.".

*The Minneapolis Star
October 14, 1965*

Construction of River Towers--the name of the project was later changed to The Towers "for purposes of advertising and décor"--marked what was intended to be the first phase of the Gateway Center redevelopment area. Original plans called for two additional phases of construction, with each phase to include two high-rise buildings, for a total of six high-rise buildings. The developer believed that the River Towers project "would do much to erase the old Washington Avenue stigma which still haunts the Gateway Center."

Ultimately, the Gateway Project came to be regarded as the biggest planning mistake in the history of Minneapolis. Twenty-two blocks of commercial buildings in downtown Minneapolis were razed. Buildings of historical significance, including the Metropolitan Building and the Pence Opera House, were destroyed.

The Towers live on. Now over 50 years old, it has one of the oldest Homeowner Associations in Minnesota.



GATEWAY CENTER
IN DOWNTOWN MINNEAPOLIS
THE KNUTSON COMPANY

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