

Downtown tower picks up tenants: 191 Peachtree fulfills Cousins CEO's vision

by Kevin Duffy

In a boost for downtown Atlanta, eight new leases have been signed since early summer at 191 Peachtree, the skyscraper that only two years ago was about 75 percent empty.

The new tenants will bring 350 more workers downtown, according to Cousins Properties, which bought the building in 2006. The uptick in downtown construction and pedestrian activity, comparatively cheap rents, proximity to MARTA, and Cousins' reputation were cited as reasons for the recent moves.

The architectural firm Cooper Carry, which has been in Buckhead for 25 years, is shifting 250 people to the 50-story tower, designed by famed architect Philip Johnson.

Kevin Cantley, Cooper Carry's president and CEO, said the change fits with the company's focus on smart growth and designing memorable urban places.

"Moving downtown kind of reflects that commitment," he said.

Another big signee is the law firm Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart, which will move about 150 employees from Midtown.

The new leases — two are expansions of existing leases at 191 Peachtree — mean the 1.2 million-square-foot building is 78 percent leased and 55 percent occupied.

Wachovia bank moved to Atlantic Station but still is leasing 11 floors at 191 Peachtree, some of which is sublet. Wachovia's lease expires next year.

Totaling 214,000 square feet, the most recent leases seem to fulfill a promise Cousins CEO Tom Bell made a year ago when he said "we plan to use our relationships and economic power to improve the situation downtown."

Bell made that statement when Cousins announced it was buying 191 Peachtree and moving its headquarters from Cobb County to downtown.

Since then, Cousins has leased 362,000 square feet at 191 Peachtree. Earlier this week it was announced that Il Mulino, a highly regarded Italian restaurant based in New York, will open in the building.

Bell, chairman of Central Atlanta Progress, said on Thursday he's confident 191 Peachtree will be fully leased by 2009. Prospective tenants are showing interest in another 350,000 square feet, he said.

Bell said relocations by Cousins and the American Cancer Society have created momentum downtown, as have the opening of the Georgia Aquarium and the World of Coke at Centennial Olympic Park.

Mayor Shirley Franklin's strong reputation in the business community adds to downtown's allure, Bell said.

A.J. Robinson, president of Central Atlanta Progress, said Cooper Carry's move from Buckhead was particularly noteworthy. Buckhead traditionally has had a more vigorous office market.

"When downtown becomes attractive to Buckhead tenants, it's saying we're competing with the entire marketplace," he said.

Downtown's Class A office vacancy rate was 29.6 percent at the end of the second quarter, easily the highest in Atlanta, according to Dorsey Market Analysis Group.

All that empty space at 191 Peachtree is one reason for the high number. But another reason is the construction of new office space downtown, according to Dorsey's Richard Poland.



191 Peachtree Street