

Promenade coming into focus as NTC Foundation hits stride

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At the former Naval Training Center in Loma Portal, NTC Foundation executive director Alan Ziter performs a drill that's becoming as routine as the marching recruits did at the site for 75 years.

Ziter shows visitors buildings and grounds slated to be transformed into the NTC Promenade, an arts, culture, science and technology center. His walks are with prospective financial donors, community members and possible tenants, many of whom have never ventured onto the facility.

"When people see what's going here close up, many want to get involved, or they ask lots of questions," Ziter said during a recent guided tour. "Sometimes when I take a look, I see things I didn't maybe notice before and that makes me even more enthusiastic about the project."

After several months delay, work on the Promenade is expected to begin this week. Six structures that once accommodated the base commanding officer's headquarters (with two attached wings), two schools and a library make up Phase One of the renovation project.

First on the redo list are Building 200 (the headquarters) and 177 (the library). The former is destined to become the Promenade visitors welcome center, and the latter an events venue (for receptions, reunions and exhibitions).

Additional phases will turn 20 other structures ... most of them barracks ... into the rest of the 28-acre Promenade.

"We have the money to start construction at the first two buildings, but we will not go forward (on the other buildings) unless we have money in the bank to finish each project," said Phil Blair, chairman of the NTC Foundation, a nonprofit organization that was created to redevelop a portion of NTC for cultural use. NTC closed in 1997, when the Navy gave the land to the city. Corky McMillin Cos. won the contract to redevelop the property, which is now known as Liberty Station. It includes 361 acres of homes, office buildings, educational components, the Promenade, and a 46-acre waterfront park now under construction.

Several former barracks southwest of Promenade Phase One have been turned into spaces for retail and commercial operations, including a future Trader Joe's store. Additional retail is expected to be added northeast (next to the golf course) of the Promenade, whose 28 acres, along with other former NTC structures, are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



SCOTT LINNETT / Union-tribune
 In a garden at the NTC Promenade, a statue of the Greek god Pan helps Alan Ziter welcome visitors to the site.

- [Other models](#)
- [NTC Promenade phase one tenants](#)

In March, Foundation officials indicated Promenade work would begin that month, with completion of the first six buildings by October, but construction was delayed.

Blair acknowledged fund raising has been slow, specifically, raising the \$18 million (up from an original \$16.7 million estimate) needed to rehabilitate the six structures.

"It's a big decision for people (donors) to make," Blair said. "Part of the reason it's not going faster is we don't have children going hungry, or homeless people. There's no sense of urgency. Prospective donors aren't saying 'If I don't make this decision today, people will get cancer or die of a heart attack.' "

The foundation has even been challenged selling \$100 bricks and \$1,000 and \$10,000 pavers ... engraved with a donor's name ... that will be used on walkways around the facility. Although the project expected to raise \$5 million when it was initiated 14 months ago, so far, just \$138,000 has been raised with the bricks.

The foundation has raised about \$1.6 million from corporations and individual donors, in addition to \$500,000 from NTC Foundation board and staff. The city's redevelopment agency has kicked in \$5.8 million. And Blair said an anonymous \$1.5 million gift recently was secured, with a second identical amount expected soon from another source.

Of the city money, \$1.5 million is going toward the renovation of Building 175, a former classroom building scheduled to be Dance Place San Diego. Foundation officials say it will be the city's "first location devoted entirely to dance." Five dance organizations are slated to work out of the 25,000-square foot building.

Under a new campaign called Advance Dance, the foundation expects to raise \$4 million more toward "Dance Place San Diego" creation; \$2 million to renovate and equip, and \$2 million to set up an endowment fund.

Construction at the dance building is set to begin in October, "if we raise the money," Ziter said.

The foundation also is selling building naming opportunities ... \$1 million to \$2 million for some structures; \$350,000 for a rose garden, and \$150,000 for certain interior spaces.

Because the Promenade site is historic, the foundation can also sell up to \$3 million in tax credits to corporate investors for Phase One.

Ziter, who successfully ran the San Diego Performing Arts League for 18 years before he was hired by the NTC Foundation two years ago, is optimistic the foundation can raise the money necessary for the renovations and is confident that the project will succeed.

"There are too many remarkably qualified people involved with it not to," he said.

After the funds are raised for the renovations and the Phase One work completed, Ziter expects the facility to be self-sustaining.

"Once we open the first six buildings (next spring), the rents and fees will generate approximately \$140,000 a month in net operating income," Ziter said.

The base rent rate for the resident organizations will be 75 cents per square foot, but the amount will come to \$1 when utilities, liability and property insurance and maintenance are included. He projects earning

approximately \$60,000 in rent, and another \$80,000 in fees from special events.

Ziter said NTC Foundation operations will be budgeted at \$115,000 per month, covered by the \$140,000 in net operating income. Next year, the foundation's annual operating budget is projected at \$1.4 million.

For now, there is no overall Promenade endowment.

"Certainly, as we open more buildings and we build a reserve, we will have a reserve fund for future maintenance on the buildings," Ziter said.

NTC Foundation officials predict the Promenade will be a "landmark and gathering place" and will constitute the second largest concentration of cultural facilities in San Diego after those in Balboa Park.

Ziter expects as many as 60 organizations to operate at the NTC Promenade by 2010. Foundation chairman Blair said any museums at the Promenade preferably will be spaces where children can interact with exhibits.

"Museums in Balboa Park tend to have more things hanging on walls," Blair said. "We want to have things kids can play with and touch. ... "We want it (the Promenade) to be an asset (of the city) and a jewel of Southern California where fun stuff goes on. But, we know that's not going to happen overnight."

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