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NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

High five for FiDi, nation's fastest grower

By BILL CRESENZO

New York's Financial District has always been known for its money, and lots of it, and the workplace for thousands of people who commute to the neighborhood for work every day.

But as a place to live? Some real estate observers say there is a reason it's called the "Financial District," and not the "Residential District."

But that hasn't stopped developers from building there, nor has it stopped people from moving there or retailers such as Hermes, Thomas Pink, Tiffany's and Canali, and restaurants such as Cipriani Downtown and Gold St., from opening there.

In fact, FiDi, as it's now called, is the fastest-growing residential neighborhood in the country.

And while it may have a while to go before it evolves into a truly 24-hour neighborhood, its fans say it is well on its way.

"I've been down here since '04, and the changes that I have seen in those four years are tremendous," said Corcoran Sunshine's Larry Krusman, director of sales at 75 Wall Street.

"The restaurants that have opened, the markets that have opened, you get a real neighborhood feel now. When you are down here on weekends, you have families out, playing with the kids and walking the dogs. It's still an emerging neighborhood, which I think is attractive to first-time buyers."

Krusman said that out of the 349 units some 177 have been sold at 75 Wall — the Hakimian Organization's luxury conversion of the former JP Morgan Chase office.

The rose-colored brick condo-hotel hybrid is the largest residential and multi-use project south of Canal Street. The newest residents will start to move in next month.

The 253 room Hyatt-managed hotel will be located at the base of the tower and will feature its own separate entrance. It's expected to open in March.

"Sales have slowed down significantly, but we still have a tremendous amount of traffic," added Krusman. "There is a lot of interest, but few people are willing to sign a contract. It leads us to believe that there is a pent-up demand. People are waiting to purchase until they see stability in the market."

According to Derrick Gross, an analyst with streeteasy.com, there are no less than 15 new development projects underway or recently completed in the Financial District. They include 99 John Deco Lofts, William Beaver House, 20 Pine — The Collection, 75 Wall, Cipriani Club Residences at 55 Wall, Greenwich Club Residences, 25 Broad-The Exchange, W. Downtown Hotel & Residences, 45 John St. be@ William, The South Star, Five Nine John Lofts, The Setai, 50 Pine, 80



DARREN SUKENIK

50 Pine, 80



Hot and happening: Platinum Properties produced this map and grid to show just how much is going on in FiDi.

South Street.

"The main reason the Financial District grew so tremendously since 2001 was the amazing tax breaks and affordable conversions," said Gross. "Right now, the condo market has gone very upscale and in my opinion, this change was too quick, it's still not an overly attractive residential neighborhood. It's one of those neighborhoods that a lot of people have a vested interest in," he said.

"And it's one of those neighborhoods that is still in transition. It's not a 24-hour neighborhood. In the past year or two, a lot of shops have opened, but it's still nothing near other neighborhoods."

According to Gross, the big draw is that it was "really cheap," but while it was great value a couple of years ago, now it is at the same price as other neighborhoods.

The median price for a studio is \$780,000. For a one bedroom, \$1,186,250. For a two bedroom, \$1,842,500, and for a three bedroom, \$2,795,000.

Darren Sukenik of Prudential Douglas Elliman says he is not a big fan of the financial district. "I am the biggest fan of New York City, and as a born and bred native, I know how I like to live and how my clients want to live," he said. "I personally see it as kind of gloomy. All of the buildings are looming and shadow-casting and there is not a lot of light."

But other brokers, like Jaylin Raymer, love it there, citing easy access to transportation and being near the water.

Raymer said that while the area needs more restaurants, it's a lot busier than it was several years ago.

Kent Swig of Swig Equities, which owns a total of three million square feet of both commercial and residential property in the Financial District, is, understandably, an unabashed fan of the area.

Swig says he coined the term "FiDi" and that the area "is number one or two in every category, after Midtown and Chicago. He says that the Financial District is the wealthiest neighborhood in America during

the daytime, and the second wealthiest at night, after the exodus of daytime workers.

"There is great night life," he said. "People might not know about it as much (as other neighborhoods,) but it is definitely changing."

But the crisis on Wall Street has had a direct effect on at least one of Swig's projects — 25 Broad Street has suspended sales there because bankrupt Lehman Brothers was financing the project.

"Our loan and loans with 2,000 mortgages worth about \$32 billion is in bankruptcy," he said. "It's quite extraordinary ... We had to put everything on hold."

Despite the problems, Swig says that the Financial District will continue to thrive.

"It's the fastest-growing residential neighborhood in New York City," he said. "It's much more diverse and getting better all the time."



75 Wall has a beach on its roof.