

Downtown Dallas

Tanya Ragan Launches Restoration of Historic Purse Building in Dallas' West End

“I’ve spent almost the last 12 years downtown. I was there when no one wanted to be there,” says Tanya Ragan, President of Wildcat Management and one of the few female commercial developers in Dallas. “I know that when you talk about the Central Business District, you are really talking about 15 distinctly different districts.”

One of those is the West End, an area Ragan describes as almost a “Boston within Dallas” now loading with offices, restaurants, retail, and some residential.

“The offices are central — so close to downtown and the core,” she says. “You can hop on DART. Or you can walk outside and still see cobbled streets.”



Tanya Ragan

Now the Minnesota native is taking one of the oldest buildings in downtown’s West End at 601 Elm Street and restoring it into a hub for the very kind of end users that are finding their way to Dallas.

“For over a decade, the biggest story in Dallas real estate has been the redevelopment of the city center. With the rehabilitation of the Purse Building, we’re bringing that energy to the West End,” Ragan said. “We want to encourage technical innovation and smart city solutions, while preserving the neighborhood’s amazing heritage.”

For 30 years, the six-story Purse Building on Elm Street, built in 1905, has been vacant, a ghost of its past as offices and warehouse space for the Parlin and Orendorff Implement Co., which sold agricultural equipment. There’s a nod to Dallas’ agricultural past. Beginning in the early 1900s, the building housed Purse & Company Wholesale Furniture. Purse, as in the family of Adelle Purse Tous-saint. Up until, 1994, Dallas County used it as office space.

Then, it just sat.

Four years ago, when she was beginning to see the life return — or perhaps, just be born — into the West End, Ragan bought the Purse building.

“It has always been called the Purse Building because of that old sign on the side,” says Ragan.

Her plans: restore and rebuild, keeping original character. Demolition will take four to five months, and then they will move straight into renovation, culminating in a 15 to 18 month experience. The interior of the 113-year-old building will be meticulously restored to its original aesthetic, including exposed brick, high ceilings, original hardwood floors, and beautiful columns.

Wildcat Management will also work with local historians to collect original paint samples, and restore the building’s exterior



The Purse Building, located at 601 Elm Street, will be the visual gateway to the historic West End district of downtown Dallas. The restoration of the 113-year-old building has begun, and will be complete in 15 to 18 months. (Images: Wildcat Management)

or to its original look. In addition to its historic charm, the renovated Purse Building will boast modern amenities such as open floor plans, floor-to-ceiling windows, and a 3,300-square-foot rooftop deck with breathtaking downtown views.

“The Purse building is the last building down here that hasn’t been rehabbed,” Ragan said. “It’s more practical to make that building into work spaces, and it works for the type of office user that likes these old buildings — the creative, the technology, and the innovation firms.”

Previous owners of the building, she says, considered converting the property into loft housing. But Ragan believes creative office space is a more practical use.

She is right. A recent report from The Brookings Institute reveals that Dallas has added 15,000 tech jobs in the last two years, leading Phoenix (8,000) and Indianapolis (5,000). The spread of tech jobs out of Silicon Valley and into the heartland or “flyover” zone is what tech giants and titans like Steve Case call the “rise of the rest”: in order to get Main Street America to stop bashing high-skill elites, we need to move them out of one concentrated area, such as the San Francisco Bay area.

It also helps with affordable housing. Dallas (and other cities) have tremendously lower housing costs than the Bay area.

The West End was an industrial area (Texas Schoolbook Depository) that was reborn in the late 1970s as a restaurant and retail district for downtown tourists.

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The faded “ghost” of the Purse Building is how 601 Elm Street got its name, says developer Tanya Ragan.



The building, once completed, will be just the kind of space that innovative firms crave, Ragan said.

Over the years, the area has ebbed and flowed, but seen a new boom in the past five years. According to Ragan, the biggest end user here is office and retail, though there are a few residential developments. Many large developers have invested in the area: Crescent Real Estate building a 163,000-square-foot office building to house Corgan Architects, Granite Properties spending more than \$75 million to turn the old West End Marketplace on Market Street into the Factory Six03 project, Lincoln Property renovating several buildings along Market Street for retail and office.

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Thanks to the plum location of the Purse Building, the planned rooftop deck will have exceptional views of downtown Dallas.

“There is a new vibrancy down there,” says Ragan. “It’s been a ripple effect of all that investment. It’s been fantastic to be able to work with the other groups. They have been willing to make the investment, and you are seeing the results of it now.”

In just a short time, she says, the area has changed to accommodate a new type of user relocating to Dallas: young, smart, innovative, and loving historical buildings.

“You’ve got transit, you’ve got affordable housing, you have walkability,” says Tanya. “There is a combination of history and creative type spaces that we don’t have in other parts of town. It’s a good think space for our growing technology hub.”

Ragan considers redevelopment of the Purse Building a natu-

ral outgrowth of her company’s mission.

“Wildcat Management was a driving force behind the turnaround of the Dallas Farmers Market, the relocation of the Historic Liberty State Bank Building, and other efforts to spur economic development in downtown Dallas,” she says. “Now we’re ready to strengthen the West End’s reputation as an emerging hub for innovators and entrepreneurs. Revitalizing the Purse Building will help attract young professionals who want to live, work, and play in one of our city’s most up-and-coming neighborhoods.”