



## VIDEO: Balke Brown Ends 15-Year Highlands Run With Encore



*by Tom Finan, Executive Director, Construction Forum STL*

Native St. Louisans know developer Balke Brown's Forest Park Highlands development at Hampton Avenue and I64/40 as the site of the Arena (aka the Checkerdome) which was imploded in 1999. Old timers and those versed in local history know that the site was originally the Forest Park Highlands, a fabled amusement park. The park's roller coaster (which burned to the ground in 1963, marking the beginning of the end for the Highlands) is echoed in office buildings fronting the highway along Oakland Avenue.

This spring, Balke Brown's Encore at Forest Park, a \$51 million, six-story, 247-unit apartment project will complete the Highlands at Forest Park development. The completion of the project marks the end of a 15-year development program for the 26-acre site.

The AFL-CIO Building Investment Trust, a commercial real estate trust fund, invested in the Encore project and its sister property, the 278-unit Cortona. Ground was broken on the project in June 2016.

Click to see video on Highlands <https://vimeo.com/255974389>

Balke Brown Transwestern has spent 15 years developing the Highlands at Forest Park on the site of The Arena, which was imploded in February 1999. “The Highlands at Forest Park has truly been a labor of love,” said developer Steve Brown when the project was first announced in 2015, adding that Encore at Forest Park is a “perfect culmination of our team’s many years of hard work and investment in this community.” Balke Brown has had to roll with the economy over the years: the sites now occupied by the Cortona and Encore were originally slated for office buildings.

When Encore opens, the Highlands will have 725 apartments, 126 hotel rooms, 300,000 square feet of office space and 20,000 square feet of stores, including Comet Coffee and Yoga Six studio. Encore’s name and design are a nod to the nearby Cortona apartments. The new building will have 37 studio, 79 two-bedroom and 126 one-bedroom apartments, plus four “penthouse” three-bedroom units with views of Forest Park.

Encore at Forest Park will incorporate all of the popular amenities its sister property currently offers, such as a quarter-acre resort style courtyard, pet-friendly facilities, a fitness studio and a multi-level pool. An addition to this project that goes beyond the Cortona’s offerings is a second-level event space opening onto a spacious outdoor deck with panoramic views of the Highland’s grassy quadrangle and Forest Park in the distance.

While located in a development anchored by office buildings, Cortona, Encore, and their predecessor apartment projects — Lofts at the Highlands East and West — offer immediate access to plenty of urban amenities. There are four movie theaters within a five-minute drive. Directly across from Forest Park, the apartments are close to the Dogtown, Hill, Highpointe, Central West End, and Delmar Loop neighborhoods.

The exteriors of both the the Encore and Cortona reflect a Euro-Urban vibe. Cortona was named after Steve Brown’s affinity for the Italian town of the same name and the Nichiha USA concrete fiber exterior panels on the buildings are Italianate shades of umber, brown, and sand. The same panel system is used on the Encore, but the colors are burnt red, ash white and slate.

Humphreys & Partners, of Dallas, is Encore’s architect. General contractor is Holland Construction. Stock and Associates was structural engineer. Subcontractors included BAM Contracting, siding and soffit; Concrete Strategies, site concrete; D&L Painting and Drywall, drywall and taping; Degenhardt Heating & Cooling, HVAC; Guarantee Electrical, electrical; Plumbing Planning Corporation, plumbing; Subsurface Constructors, shoring; and Jim Taylor Inc., roofing.