

CHAPTER SIX

THE BEACON ON 3RD LIGHTING THE WAY HOME



Carlton Towers was that concrete high-rise that rose in 1963 when downtown St. Petersburg first reached for the sky. Four decades later, Carlton Towers Partners, LLC transformed the mid-century landmark into comfortable condominiums — helping spark a new era of high-rise living in the Sunshine City.



New Urban Living with an Echo of the Past.

Once the tallest structure of its kind in St. Petersburg, The Beacon on 3rd Street (formerly Carlton Towers) now summons its irrepressible spirit to reclaim its position at the height of fine urban living.

Come, join the journey back to the heart of the community — and forward, to its exciting future — at the Beacon on 3rd Street.

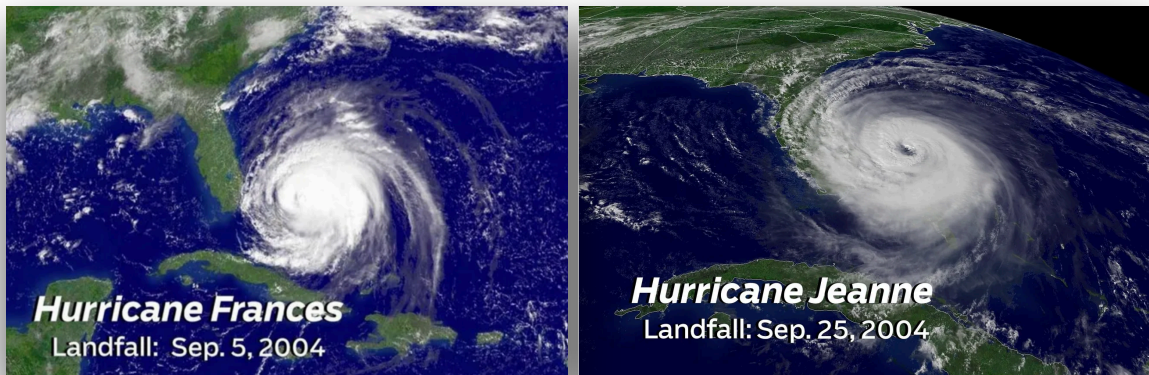
(2004 Sales Flyer)

In 2003, few could have predicted how central the newly renamed Beacon on 3rd Street would become in the lives of its original buyers. Twenty year later, several of the building's first buyers still call the Beacon home— each with a story about why they came, what they found, and why they stayed.

For many, St. Petersburg was a destination that stood out in a broader search for sun, community, and a sense of place.

"I gave myself a month to drive through the state of Florida to find a place to live," recalled Phil Rearick. "As soon as I crossed the bridge into St. Petersburg, I knew this was it. I rented a small apartment downtown and scouted the area. I just got a good vibe." The Beacon's downtown location sealed the deal. "In the long run, downtown offered more of what I wanted."

30-year-old Nick Toth was (and still is) a hurricane hunter with NOAA, (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). He and his wife lived on a sailboat, docked at the Harborage Marina just south of USFSP. That changed in 2004, when four hurricanes hit Florida, two of which were direct hits on St. Petersburg.



During that three week period in September "Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne both came ashore on the east coast of Florida and then moved west through the Tampa Bay area as strong Tropical Storms. My wife said, 'I can't do this on the boat anymore.' The Beacon was selling the condos at the time, so we walked up and took a look and went back a second time. A couple of units on the south side were still available, but we loved 222 right away. The light coming in the corner unit, even with those jalousie windows. We signed the papers a few days later."

Mike and Jeannette Harrison already lived in the building. As recent retirees looking for a warm winter home, they had chosen to rent Apt. 912 in Carlton Towers.

“John and Heidi Marling convinced us to buy (a condo). In fact, John wanted me to buy the entire 9th floor, but we chose just one, 902 on the east corner. Great view of Tampa Bay and Whitted Airport.”

For Rich Alexander, the Beacon began as an investment.

“I moved back to Tampa after college at UF, bought a house, then bought the condo in the Beacon. I wanted an investment property. It seemed like a smart move.”

Rachel Calderon was about 8 years old when she first visited St. Petersburg with her Spring Lake MI family. They came south yearly. The Florida trips continued after Rachel married Walter Foote. At one point, they considered purchasing a condo on Treasure Island.

“Walter and I also toured the Beacon and almost left—then the guy showing us around said, ‘We haven’t been to the rooftop yet.’ That changed everything.”

Ginny Hall and her husband Walt were already living in St. Petersburg, in the “Old Northeast” neighborhood.

“We were downsizing after the kids went to college. I really liked the architecture of Carlton Towers. One day, coming back from the beach, we saw the sale sign for Beacon on 3rd.”

The Garveys had a sentimental attachment to the building. As a child, Pat would come down each summer with her mother to visit her grandmother who had rented an apartment in Carlton Towers for several years. Pat and her husband, Steve, thought the building had good bones.

“The view from the roof was greener and bluer back then. No mega buildings, no Salvadore blocking the sunrise. And trees instead of USF dorms and garage. We rented it out at first, but now we live here six months out of the year.”

Peter Bartz, a nationally recognized chef at Busch Gardens, was visiting St. Petersburg with his wife, Adelia, for a culinary gathering when the city first caught his eye.

“Another chef told me, ‘You don’t want to live here—they’re all old,’” Bartz recalled. “But we drove along Beach Drive, and I liked it. I thought to myself, I’ll come back here someday.”



The German-born chef and his Brazilian wife had lived and worked around the globe, but eventually they did return—to Bayfront Towers. When rising taxes and fees made that location less appealing, they found a new home in the Beacon on 3rd.

Monica Rowland Kile, Ed Biggs, and the Marlings were some of the first condo buyers who eventually moved on.

“I think I was like the third or fourth person to purchase a condo after the Beacon converted,” Monica remembered. “I was definitely one of the first to move in. I bought it because the Beacon was across the street from the USF St. Pete campus where I was a grad student. It was so convenient. The tires on my car actually went flat, because I never drove it!

“I met my future husband on the corner of 3rd Street and 5th Avenue, right after walking out of the stairwell one day. I still consider that morning on the sidewalk in front of the Beacon our “meet-cute” story. Four years later, after we married, I moved out.”

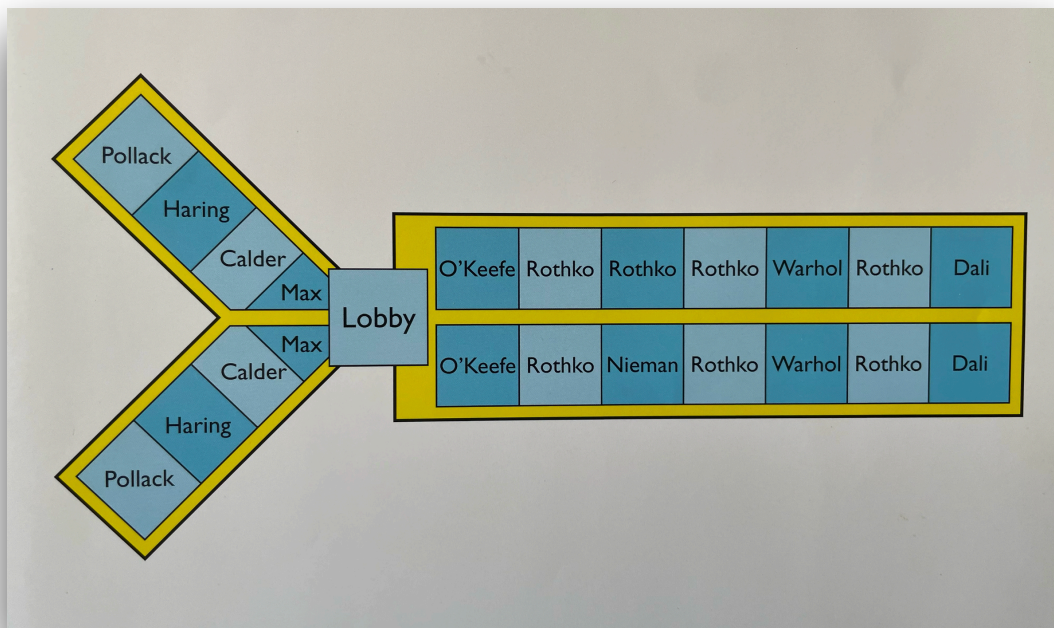
Ed Biggs, the Beacon’s designer, “bought a unit on the 10th floor and my wife purchased 319, overlooking the pool. Kathleen said it felt like a resort. Our condo on the 10th had a great view of the bay!”

Heidi and John Marling bought several condos on the 9th and 10th floors as investments. Jules Marling’s wife purchased one on the 2nd floor.

Deby Cassill could not stop at just one. She liked the apartment she had been renting so much she acquired it and the unit next door. Four years later, she picked up two more, and in 2011 her fifth condominium in the Beacon on 3rd.

NO MASTERPIECE

The Toths went for a Pollack, the Harrisons picked a Dalí, the Footes fancied a Warhol, Deby Cassill chose a Max, and Phil Rearick settled on a Rothko. No, they didn't hit the art lottery—their condos at the Beacon were given a name of a master painters.



But the condos were no masterpieces. Conditions varied widely — from untouched apartments to fully updated condos.

Rich bought two units on the Y —1021 and 1022— though little had been upgraded. “You bought a unit as it was in Carlton Towers. No upgrades. But if you needed something done, there were people working in the building.”

Phil was pleased with what he bought. “608 was pristine. It had been newly painted and carpeted, and the appliances were new. The only thing I did was re-do the kitchen.”

He also liked the privacy. “There were just a few condos left when I looked at 608. The sixth floor was high enough to look over the Madison, so no one could look into my place.”

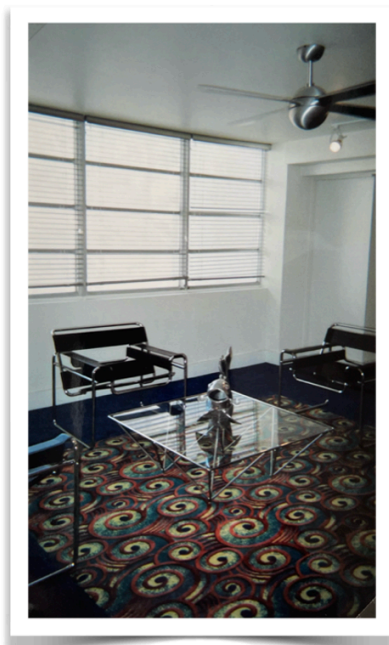
The Garveys, on the other hand, ran into issues almost immediately.



“The air conditioning wasn’t operating properly. The windows needed replacing. One pane even fell out while I was cleaning and crashed onto the upper parking deck.”

Rachel Calderon and Walter Foote were looking at units 306 and 406. “Walter thought we needed a two-bed, two-bath. Unit 306 had just been painted, so we bought it.”

Ginny Hall note a few of the building’s flaws, but appreciated its overall design. “Architecturally, I liked Carlton Towers.”



6th Floor Lobby

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

DOWNTOWN ST. PETERSBURG



1963 (LOOKING WEST)



1965 (LOOKING NORTHWEST)

When Carlton Towers opened in the mid-60s, the ten story high-rise stood out amid a mix of early-century wood cottages, small apartment courts, corner churches, and the newly opened University of South Florida's Bayboro/Bay Campus, but St. Petersburg was just beginning to step into a new era.



**PINELLAS COUNTY
JUDICIAL BUILDING
UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

1968 (LOOKING SOUTHEAST)

Over the next forty years, St. Petersburg transformed from a modest, retirement-oriented city into a major urban center within the Tampa Bay region. Its population grew steadily, bolstered by postwar migration, suburban expansion, and the appeal of a warm coastal lifestyle. Downtown's early decline began a slow reversal in the 1990s as redevelopment and waterfront investment gained momentum.

Mike Harrison remembered the immediate neighborhood as quiet and undeveloped.

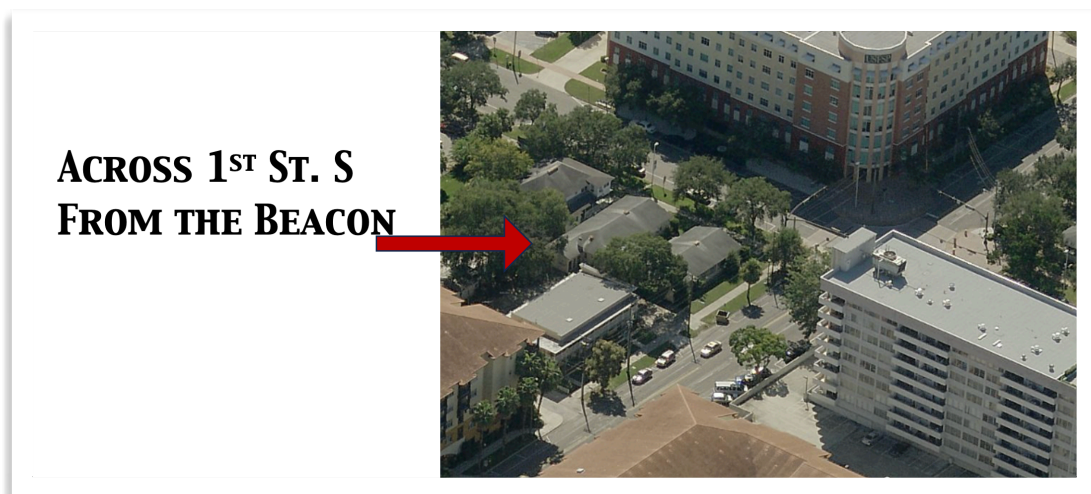
"There just wasn't much in this part of town to draw anyone here. Carlton Towers began to look old and outdated."

Nick Toth recalled "the streets around the Beacon still carried an edge of roughness. Even Beach Drive wasn't a friendly place. There was nothing there," Toth said. "Nobody came downtown—if we wanted nightlife, we'd go to Ybor City.

A more optimistic Tampa Bay Times reporter Sharon Bond could see a dramatic change, a revitalization, only a few blocks north.

"Downtown St. Petersburg has become a virtual condominium construction zone in the past five years," she wrote in 2004. "In addition to six condo towers now occupied, two more condo projects are beginning construction and two more are on the drawing boards. In addition, a number of downtown buildings such as the Snell Arcade, Detroit Hotel and Carlton Towers are being converted to condominiums."

By 2015 the lot immediately east of the Beacon on 3rd was the last remaining spot to avoid redevelopment. The Garveys remembered the lot was in disrepair.



“The residents didn’t cause trouble,” they said. “The neighborhood was safe enough during the day.” They also noted how growth came with trade-offs. “It was fun to see the city grow.



DDA Development purchased the lot in January 2015 for \$3.9 million and erected the downtown’s first “green-certified” high rise condo project, completed in 2017.

They named the 13-story building the Salvador, inspired by the nearby Salvador Dalí Museum. The original museum had opened in 1982, in a repurposed marine warehouse. In 2011 community volunteers then moved its 15-hundred artifacts into a stunning new building along the downtown waterfront. The structure combined the rational with the fantastical: a simple rectangle with hurricane-proof walls out of which erupts a large free-form geodesic glass bubble known as the “enigma.”

The museum’s construction completed the modernization of St. Petersburg’s southern waterfront.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the area they called Bayboro was a working waterfront with docks, shipyards, and warehouses. By the start of the 2000s, the area had been revitalized into an education, research, and healthcare corridor, now often referred to as the Bayboro Innovation District.



In 2023, St. Petersburg mayor Ken Welch proclaimed the news.

"Folks, our secret is out. St. Pete is not the city it used to be even 5 years ago. We are St. Pete."

