

Apartment Developer Crescent Heights Uses Tech to Draw Techies

By Neil Gonzales



The luxury-apartment complex rising tall above 10th and Market streets in San Francisco figures to be as hip and uber-modern as most of its future residents. Located in the rapidly revitalizing Mid-Market neighborhood, the quirkily named NEMA welcomes its first occupants Oct. 1 and should draw more than its fair share of techies. Twitter Inc.'s new headquarters is just across the way and a stream of other technology companies are moving in.

Not that NEMA's landlord is limiting its options. "We're targeting anyone who wants to live here: Anyone who can afford it; those from San Francisco who understand how the city is changing, the empty nesters, a mix of everyone. It's across the board," said Roman Speron, regional operations manager for Miami-based developer Crescent Heights, known for its residential projects across the country from neighboring South of Market to New York's Financial District.

But Crescent Heights knows its sweet spot is the rising tide of tech workers in Mid-Market, not only those working at Twitter but also Square and Dolby, as well as the cutting-edge restaurants and arts organizations. NEMA is a paradise for the tech-savvy, with features such as touch-screen message boards where residents and building staff can communicate regarding packages or visitors, digital charging stations with USB ports to re-juice iPhones and other mobile devices, and free Wi-Fi connectivity throughout.

“Everything is over the top,” said Sadie Simpson, Crescent Heights’ marketing manager. “There are so many amenities and services that are going to be world-class.”

“With all the people working here, the live-work convenience is key in the city,” she said. “A lot of places are hiring around here, and people need a place [nearby] to live.”

Short for “New Market,” NEMA consists of four connected towers—two to the south and two to the north—ranging from 10 stories to 37 stories. It is the city’s largest residential project under way with 754 apartments and street-level retail. It broke ground in 2010, and the final phases are supposed to be completed in the next nine months. The south towers will be ready to take in tenants beginning this fall. Already, about 100 people have signed leases.

NEMA reflects a San Francisco apartment market that remains one of the most robust in the country. Its homes are among the more than 4,700 rentals due for completion through 2016, according to recent research from Marcus & Millichap.

Development activity peaks this year as 3,000 units become available, according to Marcus, expanding local inventory by 1.3 percent. In contrast, last year saw just 670 rentals completed.

The larger selection will pressure existing properties. Effective rents should rise 3.2 percent this year to \$2,455 a month compared to last year’s gain of 9.9 percent as renters start to resist higher prices and take on roommates, the study said.

NEMA offers studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments with polished concrete or wooden floors, contemporary furnishings and oversized windows that open to panoramic bay and skyline views. The monthly rents go from \$2,450 to more than \$5,000, Speron said.

For now, NEMA’s occupants are hard-hatted workers, busily constructing the sleek glass-and-metal design by New York-based Handel Architects. Speron, a dapper fellow with a black blazer and tieless white shirt, promised the end result would be spectacular. “People are excited about the product,” he said.

From the use of recycled materials to landscaped rooftops, the building is designed to gain Silver certification from the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program of the U.S. Green Building Council. “Smart” elevators are supposed to save residents’ travel time by taking them straight to home floors without stopping. There are outdoor urban terraces, including the one on the third floor that offers grassy areas, a large fire pit surrounded by cozy seating and a 60-foot heated lap pool with an eco-friendly saline water-treatment system.

The 7,000-square-foot fitness center will sport the latest exercise equipment, and the Energy Solarium is an airy, light-filled area with wide-plank oak floors where residents can practice yoga or exercise. On-site services include 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week concierges, valet parking, a business center with Apple Inc. computers and even pet grooming.