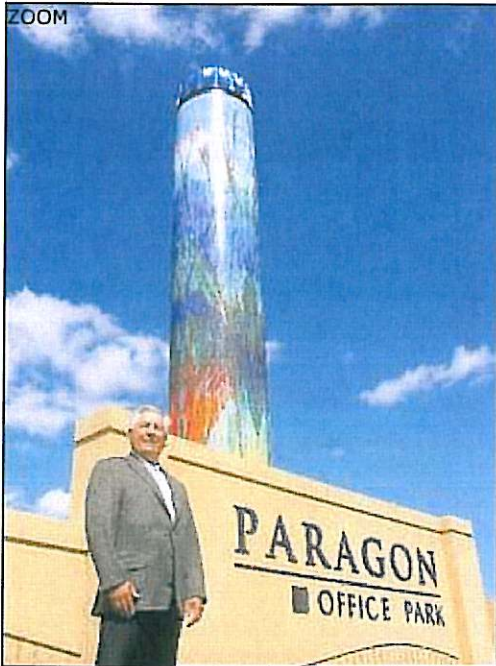


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David Elbert/The Register

Businessman Dan Rupprecht of R&R Realty wanted an iconic piece for his Urbandale office park. The Paragon Prairie Tower has nearly a million pieces of tile.

Elbert: Wright spire inspires tower in Urbandale

By DAVID ELBERT
REGISTER STAFF WRITER

September 19, 2007

STORYCHAT: 1 Comment

The erection three years ago of a 117-foot spire designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in Arizona inspired Des Moines builder Daniel Rupprecht to create a similar icon at the entrance to his new Paragon Prairie Office Park in Urbandale.

Rupprecht's tower is a mosaic scene, created by nearly a million pieces of Italian glass tile, depicting an Iowa prairie. The 5,000-square-foot artwork cost more than \$1 million to build.

It was completed last week, and lights will shine on the exterior of the 120-foot tower for the first time Thursday evening, making it an instant landmark for motorists traveling at night on nearby Interstate Highway 35/80 and Iowa Highway 141.

"Prairie grass is what the original pioneers faced when they came to Iowa," Rupprecht said. "We wanted to tell that story to motorists driving by, in hopes that they will remember what their own great-grandparents faced when they first came here."

Rupprecht got the idea, he said, because he and his wife, Phyllis, spend time in Scottsdale, Ariz., where the Wright spire was erected in 2004 to mark the entrance to a trendy retail-office park.

"We've built office parks before that had fountains as a main feature, and when we started this project" at 123rd Street and Meredith Drive, "we wanted some kind of signature feature," Rupprecht said.

The Wright spire in Arizona came to mind. It was originally designed by the world-famous architect for a church that was never built, Rupprecht said.

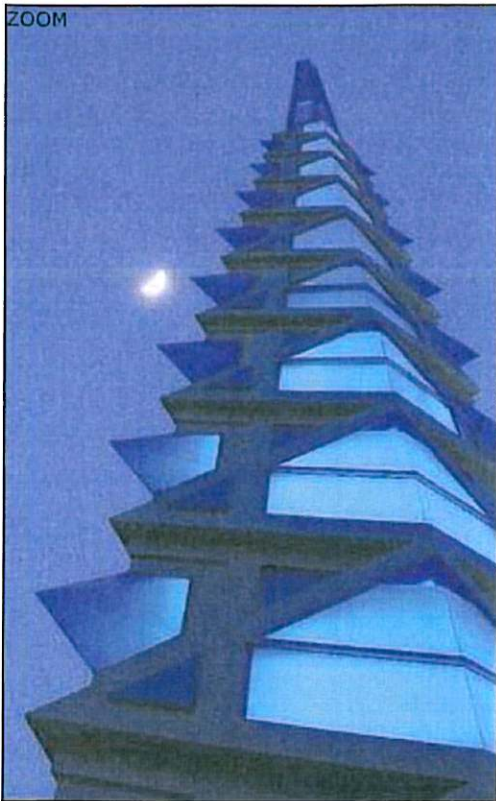
The Iowa builder contacted the Frank Lloyd Wright

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Sarah Berrett/Arizona Republic
The spire at the Promenade of Scottsdale, which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, served as the inspiration for the Paragon Prairie Tower in Urbandale.

Foundation at Taliesin West in Scottsdale and asked if Wright, who died in 1959, had left designs for other spires or towers that could be built in Iowa.

The foundation turned down Rupprecht, so he began talking with architects at RDG in Des Moines about designing an iconic piece for his Urbandale office park. The park will eventually cover 250 acres with 2.5 million square feet of office and retail space and be the largest developed by Rupprecht's R & R Realty Group.

RDG's David Dahlquist came up with a design for a tower wrapped in an Iowa prairie scene.

"We decided David's design was a better fit in Iowa than a Frank Lloyd Wright tower," Rupprecht said.

The initial budget for the project was \$750,000, he said, but the final cost will be more than double that.

"It's like a puppy," Rupprecht said of the project. "Once you start calling it by name, you've bought it."

The name is Paragon Prairie Tower.

One definition of the word paragon, according to the Random House Dictionary, is "an unusually large, round pearl." Another is "a model or pattern of excellence."

Rupprecht is convinced that when the tower is lit at night it will shine like a jewel, even more so than the Wright spire, which has become a landmark in the night sky of Scottsdale.

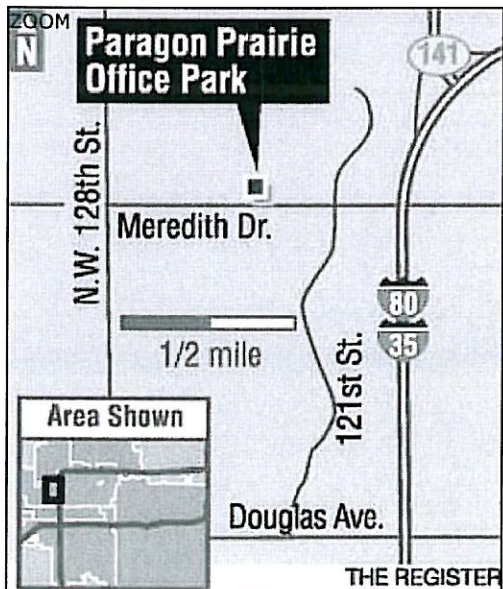
Unlike the Wright spire, which resembles a cell-phone tower during the day, the Paragon Prairie Tower will stand out during the daylight, too, Rupprecht said.

The detail in the tower is amazing, he said, because the prairie scene is created from individual 1-inch pieces of Italian glass tiles.

The tower is believed to be the largest mosaic glass tile mural in the United States, according to Dahlquist, who traveled to Ravenna, Italy, to oversee manufacture of the tiles.

Sicis, the company that made the tiles, used a computer to arrange various colors into a pattern that replicates the prairie design created by Dahlquist. The tiles were pre-arranged and attached to 1-foot-square sheets, numbered and placed the sheets in the order of assembly before leaving Italy.

When the boxes arrived in Urbandale, Dahlquist said, the contractor, Construction Services Inc., unpacked them and attached the sheets to the



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tower starting at the bottom and working clockwise around the tower.

The result, as one moves around the tower, is a continuous scene of prairie grasses, corn and wheat appearing beneath a blue, mosaic sky.

It's a scene that Frank Lloyd Wright, who helped invent the "prairie school" of architecture, would have appreciated.

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STORYCHAT

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<p>WOW!</p> <p>what a great enhancement and piece of art for the community!! love the story behind it as well.</p>	<p>Posted by: hayes17 on Wed Sep 19, 2007 1:18 pm</p>
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