



GLEN BAGO/
VANCOUVER SUN FILES

Michael Geller, president and CEO of SFU Community Trust, which is building the UniverCity development.

Campus builders take lead in responsible development

housing being produced in these communities.

But beyond what you actually see on the ground in terms of the new housing developments is a whole range of urban planning principles and building construction techniques that are being applied on a scale we have never before seen in this area. They are setting new standards and pushing the envelope further than most have gone in the development business.

Take, for example, the recent attention SFU's UniverCity development attracted when president Michael Geller declared that his project would not rely on national brand name retailers to occupy the commercial space being developed as part of the new village centre atop Burnaby Mountain.

Regardless of top-dollar offers from brand names like Starbucks and Quiznos, Geller instead plans to reach out and attract individual retailers, bringing with them the special character that comes from the personal attention of the owner/operator.

This kind of approach is in keeping with the authenticity of the small-town feel Geller has tried to re-create with UniverCity, where pedestrian movement is favoured over the automobile. Then there are the leading-edge green building standards Al Poettcker and his people at UBC Properties have developed for multi-family residential development.

Poettcker recognized the need to encourage and measure sustainable building practices for market housing and staff, faculty and student housing being developed on a campus where environmental responsibility is part of the community's conscience.

UBC Properties used the LEED in green building rating system as a basis and adapted individual applications to meet the conditions unique to our local climate and to UBC's unique housing needs. Developers building at UBC will be required upfront to outline how they plan on meeting UBC's Environmental Assessment Program standards.

Both universities are able to take the lead in responsible development because they are operating differently than traditional developers. Yes, they have as one of their goals the generation of a profit that will help to endow the university. But their objectives go beyond making money in the development business.

They are high-profile public institutions re-shaping their campuses. Their efforts are aimed at making the universities better learning places by providing housing for students and employees on campus. They operate under the scrutiny of trustees who are not only experienced developers, but also professional educators who put the university's interests first.

Finally, the land they are developing is a legacy for both universities and that legacy is being preserved as the land being developed is being leased long-term rather than being sold.

All of these unique circumstances contribute to some very interesting dynamics that will shape new leading-edge developments worth watching as they emerge.

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CITY VISION

A couple of unique research and development laboratories are pioneering breakthroughs in housing and urban development at B.C.'s two biggest universities.

They aren't your traditional academic research facilities. The work emerging from these labs isn't evolving out of some theories restricted to the classroom.

In fact, both the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University are in the real estate development business.

The work being done on these campuses is real-world stuff, building housing for students, faculty members and the general public.

New mixed-use communities complete with on-site commercial and recreational amenities are quickly reshaping the two institutional campuses, making them model communities where people can live, work, learn and play.

I've written about both developments before, focusing on the range of new