



(Greensboro News and Record, May 26, 1990)

Renaissance Plaza, First Union Tower: Stylish and Modern

TOM STEADMAN, Staff Writer

While the Jefferson-Pilot Building may be the largest and most ornate of the three additions to downtown Greensboro's skyline, it is by no means alone in its attention to detail and decor.

Just short walks away, the 20-story First Union Tower and the 19-story Renaissance Plaza have their own exterior looks - and their own stylish lobbies and unique interior features. Each building also provides more than 300,000 square feet of office space for downtown workers.

At Renaissance Plaza on North Elm and Lindsay streets, partners United Guaranty, Richardson Corp. and Capital Associates spent \$28 million to create an office building with a polished-granite exterior and huge windows that furnish views of downtown High Point to the south and the Blue Ridge Mountains to the north.

When visitors enter through polished bronze revolving doors, they can gaze up to a second-floor overlook, complete with a handrail that also is polished bronze. Drinking fountains, too, are polished bronze. The walls are White Carrera marble, and a green Verde Antique. The ceiling is nearly 30 feet off the floor. There are fountains to the left and right, and original art works for browsing.

``We want people to come in,' says David Shaw, project manager for Renaissance Plaza. ``Our thought was to make the lobby expansive, with a warm, inviting atmosphere.'

The elevators are computer-programmable and feature a message board that can flash stock quotations or other messages to riders. The elevator cabs also feature polished bronze trappings and mirrors.

The exterior features Loyal Valley granite from Texas, which designer Wesley Wong from Houston says lends ``a sense of warmth and tradition.'

Shaw says the building is 90 percent occupied, but he is still looking for a restaurant to lease a first-floor space. Up top, four of the office spaces feature scenic balconies.

United Guaranty occupies five floors of the new building, and Wachovia Bank & Trust four. The top three floors are leased by the law firm of Brooks Pierce McLendon Humphrey & Leonard. Other tenants include Richardson Corp., the law firms of Nichols Caffrey Hill Evans & Murrelle, McGladrey & Pullen, and Schell Bray Aycock Abel & Livingston.

At the First Union Tower, architect Steve Onxley of Charlotte used pink-hued Indian granite and art deco designs around the elevator doors that are polished stainless steel. Lighting fixtures also are art deco.

The revolving main door also is constructed of stainless steel, and large windows allow plenty of light into the spacious lobby.

As with Renaissance Plaza, the First Union lobby opens into the second floor. The ceiling is 29 feet high and has false columns topped by planters. A colorful granite floor and recessed lighting offer a soft, warmer look that Onxley says will make a visitor's transition from outside to inside as smooth as possible.

Plans are to locate a restaurant on the building's first floor, according to Cousins Properties officials, who say the First Union building is more than 70 percent leased. Jimmy Black, head of Cousins Properties operations in North Carolina, refuses to divulge the final cost of the building, but initial estimates ranged to \$35 million.

The largest tenant, Black says, is the law firm of Smith Helms Mullis and Moore. Others include First Union National Bank, with tellers located off the lobby, Halstead Industries, the Geneva Corp., Flynt Fabrics, the accounting firm of Ernst & Young, and the law offices of Rhodes Coates & Bennett, and Henson Henson Bayliss and Sue.

###