

One World Trade Center Fills Hole In Manhattan Skyline



A view looking south from the 61st floor of One World Trade Center November 13, 2014 in New York. Patrick Foye, Executive Director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, says that new tenants continue to sign contracts to lease space in the building. The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island can be seen (top C) in the photo. AFP PHOTO/Don Emmert.

By: Brigitte Dusseau

NEW YORK (AFP)- The jewel of the New York skyline, the pride of a whole nation, is back.

The opening of One World Trade Center, on the site of the Twin Towers that were destroyed on September 11, 2001, signals a long-awaited return to normal in the Big Apple.

Since November 3, with little fanfare, some 500 employees of the media group Conde Nast moved in. They are due to be joined by another 3,000 in early 2015.

There are also support staff on site -- brought into sharp relief this week by the spectacular rescue of two window washers suspended from the 69th floor.

The symbolic 1,776-foot (541-meter) tower -- including its antenna -- is the tallest in the United States and in the Western hemisphere

Its tapered glass silhouette overlooks the September 11 Memorial, dedicated to the 2,753 victims of the New York attacks, along with six victims of a first attack on the Twin Towers in 1993, and sits next to the museum focused on the drama.

The \$3.9 billion, 104-story tower "is the most secure office building any place in the world," said Patrick Foye, executive director of the Port Authority of NY and NJ, which owns the site.

The monumental lobby, with soaring ceilings some 47 feet high and white marble throughout, is protected by a special wall that can withstand explosions.

Its concrete foundation is 185 feet tall. A staircase is dedicated to emergency responders, and concrete protects the elevators and stairways.

The communications system was designed in collaboration with police, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security as well as private experts, Foye said.

360-degree vistas

From high up in the tower, the 360-degree view offers glimpses of the Statue of Liberty to the south and the Empire State Building and Central Park to the north.

For Big Apple visitors looking to orient themselves within Manhattan, One World Trade Center is a clear landmark at the southern end of the urban island.

For New Yorkers, it's a long-awaited sign of the determination to rebuild, slowed for years by political negotiations over just what should be done on "Ground Zero," and then by a hurting economy.

Initially dubbed "Freedom Tower," before its name was changed in 2009, One World Trade Center finally broke ground in 2006. Construction was completed at the end of 2013.

Some 65 percent of the space has already been rented out, Foye said during a visit to the 61st floor, rejecting the idea that some were afraid to move there because of the site's bloody history.

Among the new tenants -- aside from Conde Nast, which will occupy floors 20 to 44 -- are online gamemaker Hi5, publicity group Kids Creative and the China Center, which fosters cultural exchanges between the United States and China.

In all, about 5,000 people will be working in the new tower.

And by next spring, the observatory, on the 100th, 101st and 102nd floors, will open to the public, with entry fees set at \$32.

Return to normal

The opening of the new tower "represents a return to normalcy down here," Foye said, emphasizing that the people will be working there, eating in the nearby restaurants, using the subway stop that should be ready early next year, and shopping in the hundreds of thousands of square feet of shops that continue to open.

When the Twin Towers still stood, the neighborhood was mainly used as offices, and was nearly deserted by evening. But thanks to new residential construction, the population of lower Manhattan has tripled, from 20,000 to 60,000.

"This is a sign of the revitalization of downtown New York city," said Foye, of "the city and state and region and nation's response to 9/11."

The memorial and museum "will for ever commemorate what happened here," and the nearly 3,000 people who died, he said.

"We will never forget that, but I think that we want to do now is to look forward, and the site is a site of progress."