

# History of Las Colinas And the Omni Mandalay...

## The Family

Nestled in the heart of Irving, Texas is the master-planned community of Las Colinas. Las Colinas, Spanish for “the hills”, stretches across some 12,000 acres with a 960 acre “Urban Center” and was the vision of Ben Carpenter with the influence of three generations of the Carpenter family.

In 1918, John Carpenter, Sr. (Ben’s father) and his family moved from Corsicana to Dallas. He was attracted to the rolling hills northwest of Dallas and soon established a cattle ranch there along the Hackberry Creek and named it “Ranchito de Las Colinas” or “little ranch in the hills”. For many years this was a working cattle ranch in a remote area miles from the nearest major real estate developments.

In 1944, Ben Carpenter was a young lieutenant in the 124<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. Their sole mission was to free the Burmese people from the Japanese occupation force. As part of the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, better known as Merrill’s Marauders, Ben Carpenter was decorated with the Silver Star Medal for gallantry in action. It was during this military operation in Burma that he developed his interest in the art and culture of Burma.



In the years immediately following World War II, Irving leaped from a sleepy rural community of 1,500 to a city of more than 10,000. The Dallas City limits eventually extended to the eastern boundary of the Carpenter ranch and the Irving City limits formed its southern border. All at once, it seemed the municipal boundaries of the two cities were at the very borders of the Carpenter ranch.



The Carpenter family resisted selling, subdividing, or developing their land when numerous offers were extended, and instead began acquiring more land. In 1959 when John Carpenter, Sr. passed away, they had enlarged the ranch to 6,000 acres. Knowing that development of the property would soon be required, Ben Carpenter and Dan Williams, John Carpenter Sr.'s son and son-in-law, were determined to keep the natural beauty of the land. They envisioned a special community where there would be no unsightly telephone and electrical lines or blinking neon lights.



Ben Carpenter and his family no longer live on their ranch land in the heart of Las Colinas, but their soul and commitment will remain here forever. Many people say there is nothing like Las Colinas in the entire world and never will be. We are grateful to the visions of the Carpenter family and are proud to have Las Colinas as the home of the Omni Mandalay Hotel

As Carpenter explained, "First, the real estate must be convenient; then, it should be

pleasant; third, unique; then prestigious; and finally, have an air of excitement about it. Then we will have created the factor of location". The convenience factor was the most difficult to fulfill.

### **The Plan**

In 1956, three years prior to John Carpenter, Sr.'s death, they had begun planning the perfect community, which would require a number of steps to ensure its ultimate creation. The ranch land still lacked the location for a truly ideal development. There was no pre-existing developments close by, only vacant lands. Ben Carpenter was convinced that "location, location, location" was the key to the success of Las Colinas, so he set out to create the ideal location.

First, the Carpenters donated 150 acres of land as a gift for the establishment of the University of Dallas. The University now spreads along 1,000 acres in Las Colinas.

Next, they helped to establish the 885-acre L. B. Houston Park through their transfer of all the land they owned on the east bank of the Elm Fork of the Trinity River.

When it was proposed that State Highway 114 be rerouted and upgraded to freeway standards, Ben Carpenter led the citizens committee to secure the right-of-way for the project. Highway 114 is now also referred to as John W. Carpenter Freeway.

In 1962, ten acres of land was donated for the site of the Irving Healthcare System. Finally in the late 1960s, the announcement of the building of the nation's largest regional airport was made and the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport opened in 1973, just five minutes from the edge of Las Colinas.



With all the location factors falling into place, on September 14, 1973, Carpenter and Williams officially announced their plans for "a totally master-planned community" that would be balanced in commercial, residential and environmental land use. The master plan for Las Colinas originally called for a 15- to 20-year development time frame.



Once finished, they envisioned that Las Colinas would provide a resident population of 50,000 and a business population of 180,000. More than 4,500 of the total 12,000 acres in Las Colinas would be dedicated for non-business uses such as public and private parks, lakes, greenbelts, biking & pedestrian parks, schools, museums and other recreational institutions.

### **The Dream becomes Reality**

Only one year after their announcement, major corporations began relocating their headquarters to Las Colinas, which is now the home to ExxonMobil, Zales, Nokia and other equally prestigious companies.



Many other unique qualities, which Las Colinas now boasts, were born soon thereafter. In 1974 Lake Carolyn, a man-made lake named after Ben's sister was built along with the meandering canals surrounding the area.

The centerpiece of Las Colinas is Williams Square, located directly across Lake Carolyn from the Omni Hotel. Williams Square is a monumental pink granite plaza, which is the size of two football fields' side-by-side. The plaza is best known for its 400-foot long watercourse with nine larger than life bronzed mustangs running through. The mustangs' area, created by internationally renowned wildlife sculptor Robert Glen of Nairobi, Kenya is known as the "Mustangs of Las Colinas" with seven adult and two young mustangs; it is the world's largest equestrian sculpture, and one of the largest tourist attractions in

Texas. Located in the west tower of Williams Square is the Mustang Sculpture Exhibit where a film depicts the fascinating history of the creation of the mustangs.



The towers surrounding Williams Square have nearly two million square feet of office space and 60,000 square feet of retail space and are one of the largest suburban office developments in the country. The Texas pink granite towers are topped with copper roofs, the largest copper roofing project ever.

Another Texas tradition, cattle, can be seen in the five marble cows sculpted by Harold Clifton and set in nearby Bluebonnet Hill at the corner of Highway 114 and Rochelle. It is a favorite spot for pictures and lunchtime picnics.



The Flower Clock at Highway 114 and O'Connor Road, Las Colinas' busiest intersection, is a landmark for Las Colinas where new flowers are planted approximately six times a year with the changing seasons. The diameter of the clock measures 37 feet, while the minute hand stretches 15 feet.



In 1982, the Las Colinas Equestrian Center opened and soon began hosting National Grand Prix Championships. Next, the Studios of Las Colinas were unveiled with 125 acres and over 500,000 square feet of office, technical and studio space that rivals that of any Hollywood studio. Since the complex opened, portions of films such as *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Silkwood*, *JFK*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Robocop* and *the Leap of Faith* were filmed in these studios. Artists such as ZZ Top, KISS, Stevie Wonder, Amy Grant, Julian Lennon and Linda Ronstadt have graced its stages for rehearsals and music videos.

Just a few minutes from the Las Colinas Urban Center is the impressive Texas Stadium, home of the Super Bowl champions Dallas Cowboys. The stadium was built in 1969 for \$35 million. The cost was defrayed by the sale of 178 suites (private rooms with excellent views of the playing field) at \$50,000 a piece. The controversial hole in the dome measures two-and-one-half acres, the exact size of the field.

Believe it or not, the Stadium originally opened not with a football game, but with a crusade conducted by evangelist Billy Graham. Many times the Stadium is contracted for special events. When Tom Cruise was nearby filming "*Born on the Fourth of July*", he brought his whole cast and crew out to play football on the field. If you would like a glimpse inside the Stadium and locker rooms, officials offer an hour-long tour of this facility throughout the year.

### **The birth of the Omni Mandalay**

In 1983, Ben Carpenter, along with his son John W. Carpenter III, decided to design and construct a hotel to complete his vision of Las Colinas. It would be a grand hotel located in the heart of the Urban Center, which would offer guests easy access to Las Colinas corporations, but also provide an atmosphere where visitors could feel as if they have escaped the rigors of everyday life....



The Mandalay Hotel was born!

Burma, now known as Myanmar, occupies a large area of land between India and China. It was, and still is, a trade route for business between China and India. Mandalay is the second largest city in Burma, the largest and also the capital is Yangon (formerly known as Rangoon), and was founded and built in 1856-57 AD by King Mindon.



Mandalay lies southwest of a mountain in the Blue Shan Hills, called the Mandalay Hill. The Mandalay Hill overlooks the city to the Irrawaddy River and toward the south and southwest are the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

Mandalay is regarded as the historical cultural center of Myanmar, filled with numerous

white pagodas with gold-gilded rooftops and gold-encrusted Buddha's, which dot the entire country. This inspired the Burmese to refer to their country as "Shway Pyi Daw" or The Golden Land. Mandalay was then immortalized in Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The Road to Mandalay."



When planning the first hotel for Las Colinas, he named the hotel "Mandalay" to satisfy his desire for a historical placement with his personal life experience. The furnishings and accessories relate to the history of the Mandalay with Far Eastern influences. When you stroll through the Omni Mandalay Hotel, you will find special rooms and locations identified by the fascinating names of the towns, rivers and other historical areas associated with Myanmar and the history of the Mandalay. Two familiar meeting rooms within the Omni are named after rivers in Myanmar. The Salween River has its source in Tibet and the Irrawaddy River is the largest river, beginning in the Himalayas and flowing for 1,300 miles.

On June 26, 1992, Omni Hotels Corporation acquired the Mandalay property. Jim Looney, of Looney, Benson & Hlavaty was hired on as the Interior designer for the restoration. Throughout the project you will find that the Oriental and English overtones have been maintained – true to the Carpenter family vision.



If you are a guest of the Omni Mandalay, you should note that the rooms the largest in the Dallas Metroplex. And, the Mandalay Suites provide our guests with a sense of home away from home – open, airy, natural lighting from a panoramic curved window – and service that compares to none.

Welcome.