

Carol Schatz

reinvents downtown— one deal at a time

is the Standard Hotel, which surprised many people with its choice to open a downtown location in 2002 — and then proceeded to throw a series of summer rooftop parties that brought entertainment people and trendsetters in droves. Downtown was declared the new nightlife frontier, and openings of unique little hipster hangouts like the Golden Gopher and the Edison cemented its reputation.

"The Standard took a chance in coming here," says Schatz. And for a hotel, yes, it was risky. But for a nightlife brand it made sense. As Schatz explains, when people start moving into a neighborhood, bars are quick to follow — because residents want somewhere local to socialize. Next come restaurants and retail.

"This whole block was completely closed; the storefronts were boarded up," she says as we walk past a sleek new loft development that recalls San Francisco's South of Market area. Across the street there's a Famima, a hair salon, a print shop. Around the corner is Schatz's pride and joy: a 7-Eleven. "But don't you understand what it means?" she asks as I fail to suppress a giggle. "It means we're a 24-hour neighborhood now." Strictly speaking, this isn't exactly the case. Downtown is more than a neighborhood; it's several loosely connected ones with their own names (the Business District, the Old Bank District, etc.) and borders and loyal local residents. A couple of them are well on the way to being as close to 24 hours as L.A. can get. Others are still in 'plywood' phase, but hoping to debut their revitalization efforts soon. And as for a select few, well... you wouldn't want to walk in them after dark.

"If you look at urban revitalization, it usually begins with a few intrepid pioneers who are willing to live through the transitions of a changing neighborhood," says Carol E. Schatz, President and CEO of the Downtown Center Business Improvement District (DCBID). We are standing on the corner of 6th and Wilshire, where urban revitalization is well past the beginning stages and into full-steam-ahead buildout. After years of dragging their feet, developers and retailers have finally decided that this is the place to be; everywhere you look, a sign announces a new restaurant or salon opening in a long-empty space. As the dust comes off the old buildings, the elegance of their original

facades is revealed. Big, expensive plans are in place where before there were only grimy, nondescript chunks of cityscape. This exciting landscape has been 10 years in the making, and while Schatz can't (and wouldn't) claim full responsibility, she has been one of the driving forces behind it — planning, strategizing, fundraising, wooing and cajoling every business person and civic leader in her vast Rolodex.

"This was one of the first buildings to convert to live/work housing," she gestures to the Pegasus, a former oil headquarters now 322-unit apartment building, located kitty-corner to her office. Across the street

Add to these community differences that not everyone's happy about the downtown gentrification. (Not everyone is ever happy about gentrification.) Certainly it has left a lot of low-income, no-income and drifter types with nowhere to go. There's been backlash, and there will be more. Schatz still has her work cut out for her. And she knows it. "It's taken Carol 10 years to get downtown to the place it is now," says a friend. "And she plans on it taking another 10. She's told me the cycle of urban revitalization typically takes 20 years — and as a lifetime career goal, that suits her just right."

— Lena Katz