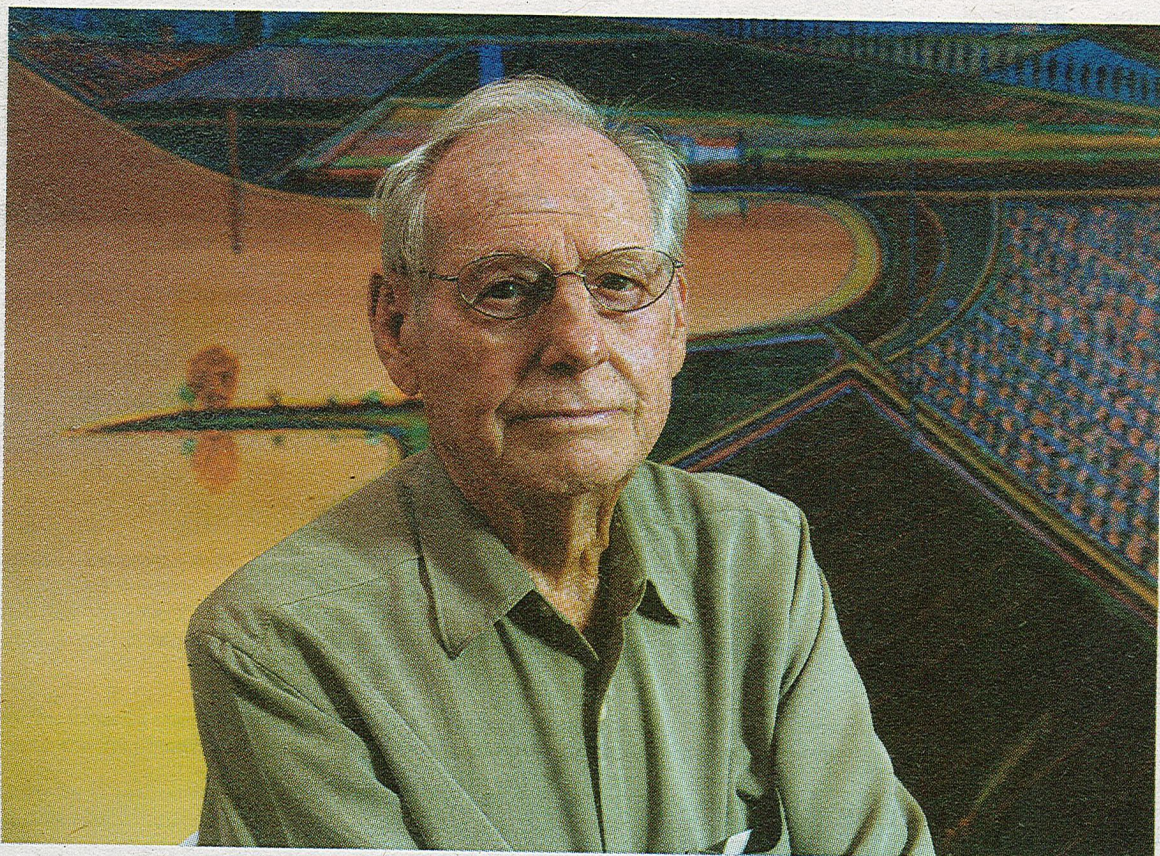


# MIDTOWN OFFICE BUILDING A TRIBUTE TO TWO LOCAL ICONS

Developer and artist honored by sons with project ready for planning board next month



MICHAEL SHAW | STAFF WRITER

Developer Michael Heller Jr. is taking public art to new heights in midtown Sacramento — an office building that would serve as a four-story canvas for internationally known artist Wayne Thiebaud.

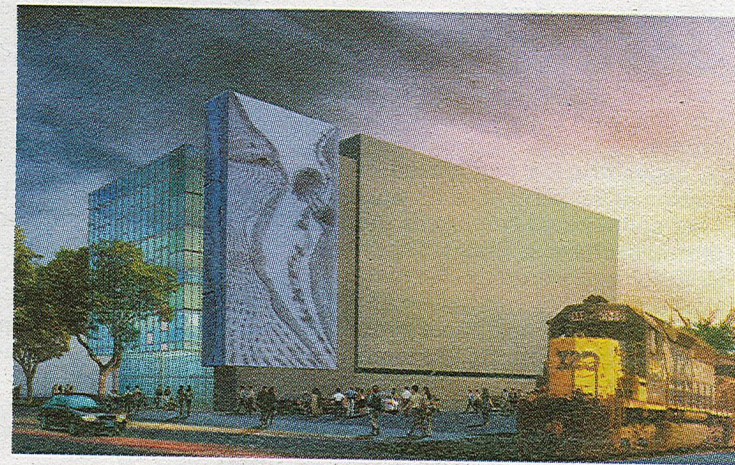
“The Tribute building,” as it’s being called, would rise on a lot at 20th Street and Capitol Avenue. Heller bought it this summer for a planned collaboration with Thiebaud’s son Paul, an art gallery owner, with the idea of making art a theme throughout.

It’s a tribute to the elder Thiebaud of Sacramento and Heller’s father, Michael Heller Sr., a longtime Sacramento builder and developer who died last year. The families have been close for years.

“I don’t know if in my whole life I’ll have a chance to do something like this,” Heller said at his office in the MARRS building, a project of his that’s been part of the midtown renaissance. “I think this is a ... unique project. I don’t believe there is anything like it in Sacramento.

While art will be incorporated throughout the 47,000-square-foot building, the most prominent feature is Thiebaud’s three-sided mosaic on the building’s west side that would be visible from almost any angle on Capitol Avenue. The property is next to railroad tracks, so there’s no neighboring building to block the view

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DENNIS MCCOY | SACRAMENTO BUSINESS JOURNAL, RENDERING COURTESY OF HELLER PACIFIC INC.

A three-sided mosaic by artist Wayne Thiebaud, above, would grace the side of the proposed Tribute building, right, in midtown Sacramento. Michael Heller Jr. and Thiebaud’s son Paul are planning the building as a tribute to their fathers. The design would be a Sacramento River delta scene, which is a theme in the elder Thiebaud’s work of late.



# TRIBUTE | Buehler & Buehler wants to occupy one floor, completion planned for mid-2010

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of the artwork.

Thiebaud, 87, is recognized as an important contributor to the pop art movement starting with his renditions of ordinary objects such as cakes and pies. The planned mosaic design is a Sacramento River delta scene, a Thiebaud theme of late.

Paul Thiebaud, who owns galleries in San Francisco and New York, would oversee a rotating exhibit of art throughout the new building.

"In Paris about 10 years ago, while looking up at the Eiffel Tower, we made a pact we were going to do a building together," Paul Thiebaud said of the collaboration with Heller. "It was a matter of time before this came together."

The project and building design are expected to be reviewed by Sacramento's Planning Commission and Design Commission in the next month. If everything falls into place, Heller Pacific Inc. plans construction for the spring and completion

by mid-2010. The building would be mixed-use, with offices above restaurants or other retail space.

"We're not through the approval process," Heller said. "(We hope) the city will embrace this the way the community has."

Heller has been meeting with community groups and will present the building at a neighborhood association meeting Monday.

Financing the \$12 million building is still an issue, but a tenant is already on board, which makes the project more attractive to financial backers. Buehler & Buehler Structural Engineers Inc. occupies a building at 600 Q St. that Heller developed, but the company wants to move into at least a full floor in the new building, about 15,000 square feet. The company would serve as the structural engineer on the project.

"It has the potential to be an iconic building," said Dave Hutchinson, president of Buehler & Buehler. "With Wayne

Thiebaud involved, we ought to get a lot of mileage out of that."

The company plans to combine its Roseville and Sacramento offices at the midtown site while reserving some room to grow, he said.

Heller would move his company's office there as well. Signing other tenants before construction could help ease financing at a time when commercial mortgages and construction loans have been hamstrung by the global credit crisis.

"This particular building is going to be a statement," said Ken Turton, a central city specialist at CB Richard Ellis who has represented Heller in lease negotiations for other buildings and will do the same for the Tribute. He said lease rates for Class A buildings in midtown don't rival skyscrapers, but they are more expensive than an ordinary suburban space. Some tenants are willing to pay a little more for the midtown atmosphere and amenities, he said.

Lionakis Beaumont Design Group is

project architect. The exterior walls will be done with four different types of glass, matching the building's mosaic motif.

The building has a long story. Michael Heller Sr. was a general contractor who more than 50 years ago built the Sacramento Municipal Utility District headquarters, a project that included a very prominent public art mosaic by Wayne Thiebaud. The families became friends, and the two sons maintain a close friendship today.

Heller and his father often ate at The Waterboy restaurant, which is across the street from the Tribute site, formerly home to a ramshackle building.

"He'd point out the window and say, 'What about that property?'" Heller said. When the opportunity came to buy that site, he leapt.

"Suddenly, this project had a lot of emotion for me," he said. "It's not just another development."

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