

## SPEAKING OUT

Groundbreaking for ESL Federal Credit Union headquarters

# ESL Federal Credit Union found Flour City to be business friend



**DAVID FIEDLER**  
 GUEST  
 ESSAYIST

**B**uilt of steel, glass, concrete and stone, the new downtown headquarters for ESL Federal Credit Union will also have something in common with the woody bamboo tree.

Bamboo is the fastest-growing woody plant, rising as high as 80 feet in a two-month growing season. Before showing visible growth, however, bamboo trees spend years acclimating to the soil and establishing roots.

The ESL headquarters also is starting to grow quickly after thoroughly establishing a foundation. In February, we announced plans to build a six-story office building for up to 500 employees at 225 Chestnut St. Today we are breaking ground and in the spring of 2010 will move in with more than 300 employees.

With our current headquarters lease expiring in 2010, we began to explore space options for our growing organization about two years ago. We first set baseline requirements — not just square footage, but features that would improve efficiency for the benefit of ESL's 285,000 members, as well as our employees' comfort and productivity. We focused on locations that would be easily accessible for members and employees.

With the core requirements set, our site-selection team hired a real-estate broker to develop a comprehensive set of options. The list included more than 30



Provided by LaBella Associates

Artist's rendering of the ESL Federal Credit Union headquarters to be built in downtown Rochester.

potential sites, all of which we toured.

Our team quickly whittled the long list of sites to about 10. We ran them through a sophisticated financial model to project costs and value over the life of the building. Three finalists emerged from this analysis, any of which could potentially meet ESL's requirements — a suburban office park, city location outside downtown and the Chestnut Street site.

Our site selection process shattered some commonly held myths about downtown development:

■ **Myth #1:** Greater Rochester is not a business-friendly climate. We were impressed throughout our search by the professionalism, responsiveness and collaboration of all involved — private developers, consultants and especially government officials.

■ **Myth #2:** The wheels of city government turn too slowly to compete with private-sector

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deals. Frankly, we feared that the approval and permit process for city-owned land would simply take too long to accommodate our need to move by spring 2010. But we must give accolades to Mayor Robert Duffy and the city's economic development team. They cut through red tape so that the city could compete effectively with private developers.

■ **Myth #3:** Parking is always a problem downtown. Providing free employee parking was a must for ESL. So, we decided to build a garage, providing free employee parking, which means we won't be adding to parking pressures downtown. However, even with this decision, the Chestnut Street site was an eco-

nomically viable alternative.

■ **Myth #4:** It is difficult to work with multiple groups to accomplish your business objectives. COMIDA involvement was essential to structuring the deal, and officials from both the city and county worked seamlessly as part of one development team. The Green JobsPlus incentives approved by COMIDA, available to qualified employers anywhere in Monroe County, are helping us to cost-justify designs that will make ESL's new headquarters cutting-edge friendly to the environment.

If these myths are keeping other organizations from considering the center city, I encourage them to take a second look. In ESL's structured and competitive process, we found the business climate downtown to be both warm and conducive to growth. □

Fiedler is CEO, ESL Federal Credit Union.

# Green growth protects environment



**MAGGIE BROOKS**

GUEST  
ESSAYIST

Last year, Monroe County was proud to announce Green JobsPlus, an exciting new program offered through our job creation engine, the County of Monroe Industrial Development Agency. Green JobsPlus allows businesses to grow here in our community while making a commitment to protect the environment.

ESL was the first company to apply for the Green JobsPlus program as they developed plans to build a new corporate headquarters downtown. In doing so, ESL has made a commitment to construct a "green" building, seeking LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification and employing environmentally sound practices for construction and building sustainability. This exciting project represents a more than \$50 million investment in our community. In addition, the new ESL headquarters project is expected to create 250 construction jobs. The county is proud to partner with ESL in this impor-

tant project to not only help revitalize our center city and create jobs, but to protect our environment as our economy grows.

While ESL was the first to take advantage of Green JobsPlus, we are seeing a growing interest in the program. Pathfinder Holdings LLC, a certified woman-owned engineering and architectural services company, has also applied for Green JobsPlus incentives. The company has proposed to renovate a 9,200-square foot, three-story building in the city to serve as its home office. The renovations will be performed in a sustainable manner from building materials to construction techniques, and

the scope of the upgrades will qualify the building for LEED Silver certification.

This is all exciting news for Monroe County, the city of Rochester, and our economy. As businesses make a commitment to sustainability as they grow and flourish in our community, we will reap the benefits of more jobs and a healthy environment. These sound investments will protect our first-rate quality of life, ensuring that our community continues to be an outstanding place to live, work and raise a family. □

*Brooks is Monroe County executive.*

# Optimism and building cranes are rising downtown



**ROBERT DUFFY**

GUEST  
ESSAYIST

Downtown has played different roles at different points in our community's history. When I was growing up, places like Sibley's, McCurdy's, the RKO Palace and Regent movie theaters and attractions at Midtown Plaza drew people downtown. However, as has happened in cities nationwide, recent years have presented us with challenges. We have struggled to adjust to these changes

and to bring a new vibrancy to our downtown.

As has been this community's hallmark, homegrown businesses are helping to spearhead Rochester's revival. Others have followed in the footsteps of Abelard Reynolds, who built the famous Reynolds Arcade in 1828 and Daniel Powers, who constructed the majestic Powers Building in 1868. We are grateful to have community leaders Arunas Chesonis, CEO of PAETEC, and David Fiedler, CEO of ESL Federal Credit Union, continue this proud tradition. We owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude for their vision, commitment and belief in our city.

We are excited that one of the largest telecommunication com-

panies in the United States, PAETEC, will build a 500,000-square foot, Class-A facility on a portion of the Midtown property. The facility is anticipated to house more than 1,000 employees and create up to 200 construction jobs.

ESL, one of the country's largest and most successful credit unions, will bring nearly 250 construction jobs, more than 300 employees by the year 2010 and between \$50 million and \$60 million in investments within the city with its new corporate headquarters.

Both PAETEC and ESL are successful, thriving companies that could have located anywhere but chose downtown Rochester. Our Center City is a

window into the entire community's growth and vitality. Just as developments like those at Cornhill Landing and the Mills at High Falls have been greeted with great enthusiasm, exciting public and private projects continue to be planned and developed for our downtown.

We are right on the cusp of a real turning point for Rochester. It will take a lot of hard work, careful planning and execution to ensure a true renaissance for downtown.

I am proud to say that I can count on community leaders like Chesonis and Fiedler and a great team at City Hall to realize our vision. □

*Duffy is Rochester's mayor.*