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2 towers rising in Westchase

Office buildings could add up to 2,500 employees

By Annette Baird | December 31, 2012

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Not since 2008 has the economic climate been this good in the Westchase District, and based on the rate of construction, things may only get better in the coming year.

Two new office towers and an apartment complex are being built, promising an influx of hundreds of new jobs.

"New construction creates jobs, and new office space brings in more employees who need apartments, who will be eating out in our restaurants and shopping in the area," Westchase District spokeswoman **Sherry Fox** said.

Behringer Harvard REIT I Inc. recently started construction of Two BriarLake Plaza, in the shadow of its sister building One BriarLake Plaza on the West Sam Houston Parkway frontage road, just south of Briar Forest.

The 19-story, 320,000-square-foot building, expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2014, is already half-leased to Samsung Engineering America.

Samsung, which offices in One BriarLake Plaza, will move to the new building to consolidate and absorb growth, Fox said. Attempts to contact a representative for Samsung were unsuccessful.

Designed by **Kinsey Architects** to complement the first building, the new structure will feature a seven-story parking garage topped by 12 stories of office space that will be encased in a glass-walled exterior. The building is expected to achieve silver certification under the U.S. Green Building Council for energy saving features and will house a fitness center, conference facility and café for the use of employees of both buildings, which will be connected by a walkway.

"The reason for building the second phase is that the first phase has been extremely successful," said **Greg Brooke**, senior vice president at Behringer. "The growth of west Houston along with pre-leasing on the new project made it easy to move forward on the development."

Fox said leasing in the district hit 90 percent occupancy for the first time since the last quarter of 2008, and she doesn't expect Behringer to have a problem leasing the remaining space at BriarLake Plaza.

Neither does leasing agent **Clint Bawcom** of Cassidy Turley. He said the BriarLake Plaza complex benefits from proximity to Sam Houston Tollway, Interstate 10 and the Westpark Tollway.

"This is a very exciting project for everybody," Bawcom said.

Attempts to get information about the construction cost were unsuccessful.

Nearby, Granite Properties is building a \$75 million, 12-story office tower at 3141 Briarpark Drive, and the facility is slated for completion later this year. Developer **Wood Partners** is building a 256-unit apartment complex, Alta Woodlake Square, at Westheimer and Gessner. That project is also expected to be completed by year's end.

While the building boom could present challenges with infrastructure and mobility, what with potentially 2,500 employees between the planned Granite Properties building and the new BriarLake Plaza one, Fox said the district has in place traffic studies and transportation plans.

"We can modify and update those to accommodate new growth," she said.