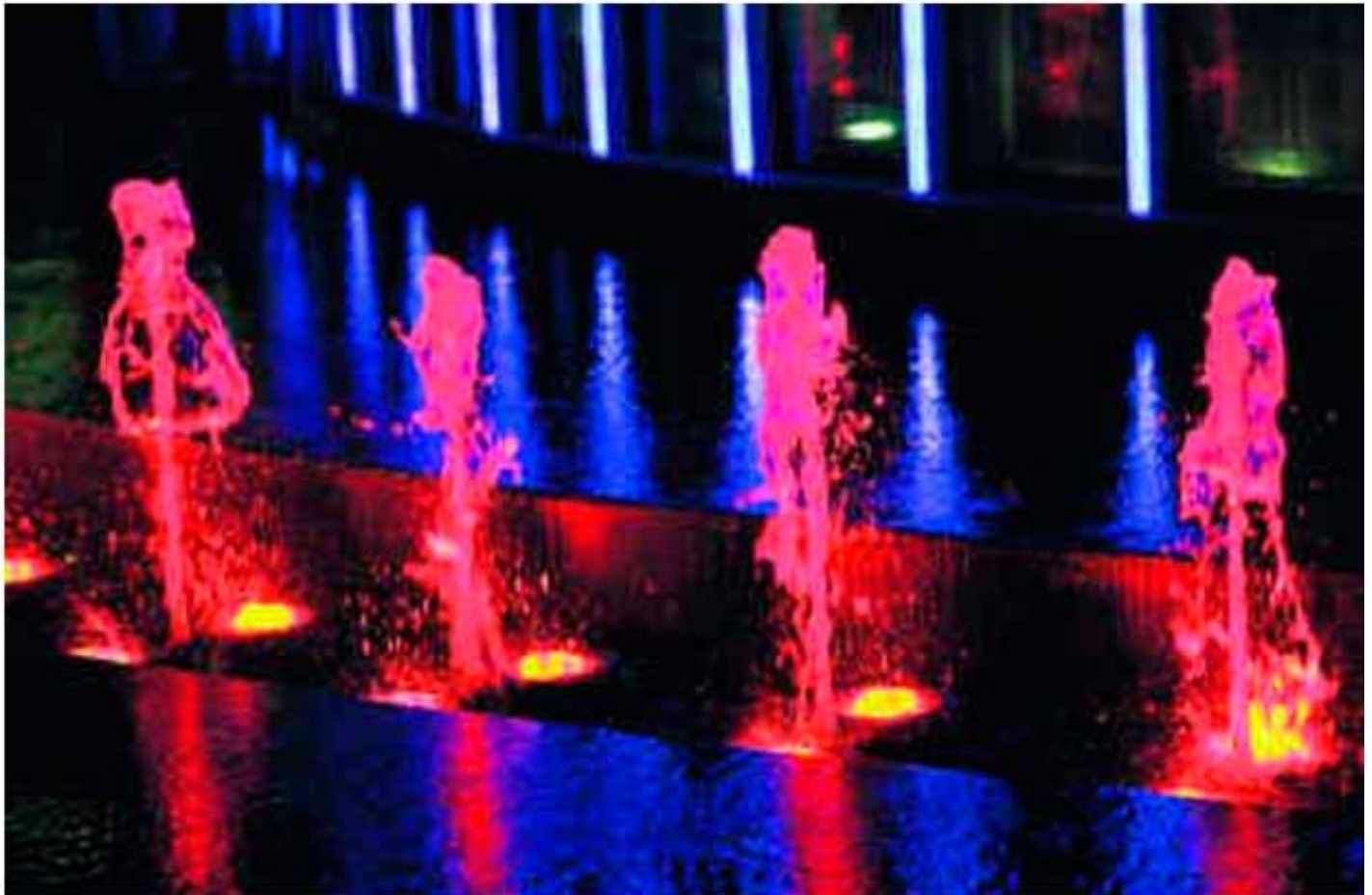


To give new Dallas buildings pizazz, owners trip the lights fantastic



JOSH BIRNBAUM/DMN

Splashes of pink, red and blue light illuminate a fountain in front of the Hunt building.

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Published: 09 July 2010 07:54 AM

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To celebrate Independence Day, the owners of Uptown's 17 Seventeen [McKinney](#) tower wanted to do more than just hang out a flag or some bright bunting.

Well, they got it.

The 19-story lights that run up one corner of the new office tower were illuminated to simulate a waving American flag. Blue lights in eye-popping patterns are just one effect used on the Hunt Consolidated tower at Akard Street and Woodall Rodgers Freeway in Dallas. The bold treatment is part of a marketing trend for new buildings.

Building owner Granite Properties created the effect with 86,000 LED panels built into the skin of the building.

"Having a feature to your building that draws attention is important," said Granite chief operating officer Greg Fuller. "It's marketing, but it's very location-specific.

"Uptown is a brighter-light type of market."

Most buildings going up along the Woodall Rodgers Freeway corridor sport high-tech light shows, using low-energy displays and computer programs to get their look.

Hunt Consolidated Inc.'s headquarters tower at Woodall Rodgers and Akard Street has one of the most elaborate displays. The tower, with its curved front, has multiple panels of LED lights on three sides.

"We can provide multicolor - over a million different colors - light displays that are static, moving and changing colors, as well as video feed," said Tom Meurer, senior vice president for the energy firm. "We are limited by our imagination and the technical restraints of the system.

"We are dreaming up new design as the occasions call for it. Last week we did a 'Dallas Digs Dirk' to support keeping Dirk with [the Mavericks](#)."

Hunt Consolidated decided to go with the system after CEO Ray Hunt saw a display on another building.

"Dallas is growing downtown, and this would add to the excitement of promoting downtown," Meurer said.

The new Saint Ann Court and 2000 McKinney Avenue office towers both have bands of LEDs running up their exteriors.

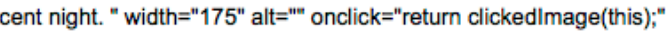
"We have lighting on the spine wall on the north façade that wraps around," said Saint Ann Court leasing director Jihane Boury. "We wanted to extenuate the architecture with the lighting.

"We didn't want it to be too flashy."

The building also has LED light strips in the lobby ceiling and in the motor court on Harry Hines. The computer-controlled displays can be changed with the tap of a keyboard.

"We can do striping or change it to all the colors of the rainbow," Boury said. "Right now, we have it blue, and we have had it green before."

Bright heritage

Building lights are old hat in Big D. An edgy display made the 17 Seventeen McKinney building stand out in Uptown on a recent night.  An edgy display made the 17 Seventeen McKinney building stand out in Uptown on a recent night.

As far back as the 1920s, new skyscrapers like the art deco Tower Petroleum building and the Davis Building used colored lights on top to stand out.

By the time the flying red horse sign was installed on top of the Magnolia Building in 1934, lighting displays were de rigueur downtown.

The practice went into overdrive in the 1980s, when Reunion Tower was topped with a light-show ball and the 72-story [Bank of America Plaza](#) was outlined with 2 miles of argon-filled tubes.

But the latest generation of center-city buildings is breaking ground.

One Arts Plaza was the first to use a large LED display. Its big square of lighted cubes overlooks the Arts District.

And we can expect downtown's newest building, the convention center hotel, to have some kind of light show when it opens.

"We have been looking at many different types for the Dallas Omni," said developer Jack Matthews. "We have not settled on anything to date.

"LED was where we started, but we are looking at other solutions."

LEDs shine

Light emitting diodes use less power than standard bulbs.

"The power usage has to be very low because the tenants don't want to pay extra," Fuller said. "They don't put off much heat, so they don't add to the air-conditioning load."

Bulbs burn out and can be damaged, but LED systems are more durable.

"They burn for like 60,000 hours," Fuller said. "We don't expect to replace any lights for 10 years."

Dallas architect Larry Good - whose firm designed 17 Seventeen McKinney - admits that he has mixed emotions about some of the garish lights. "But it's a tradition," he said. "Dallas has been lighting its buildings boldly for a long time."

On most nights the 17 Seventeen tower will be using just white lights that glow "like a lantern," he said. But towers yet to come are likely to opt for more eye-catching displays, Good said.

"Is this going to become a little too much as we do more and more buildings like this?" he said. "Because these buildings are in a competitive market, it's going to keep happening."