

GRAND OPENING

Marketing Splash

Fifield's designer showcase helps prospective residents envision apartment homes for their future.





Fifield sent 3,500 invitations to the grand opening event and expected 200 guests each night to show; more than 1,500 attended.



The K2 event was open to the public and featured seven “pop-up” model apartments.

When Fifield Cos.’ Vice Chairman and Principal Randy Fifield was brainstorming ways to celebrate the grand opening of a luxury apartment community in Chicago’s Fulton River District, she came up with the idea of a “Designer Showcase.”

“Designer showcases were done a long, long time ago when people were trying to sell luxury housing,” Fifield says. “We asked ourselves, ‘What if we changed the mindset of people and physically showed them the benefits of renting luxury by writing just one rent check versus putting down millions for a home?’”

The event, which was open to the public, featured seven “pop-up” model apartments from three Chicago-area designers on the 27th floor of K2, the 496-unit high-rise. Guests, including designers, local businesses, charities and prospective residents, were free to view the amenities floor, mingle poolside next to the DJ, check out the Maserati and Bentley outside or head upstairs to the actual showcase.

“We had the designers take floor plans you’d find in most apartment communities and create thought-provoking units,” Fifield explains. “Some were very reasonable, with pieces from places like Crate & Barrel, for example. We didn’t design anything that a normal person couldn’t go out and do on their own.”

The model units showed a range of styles, from an apartment designed for a single 20-something living in a studio to one for an “empty nester” who wants a two-bedroom residence but feels the extra room is often wasted. (One designer’s solution: A Murphy bed that folds into a desk.)

Fifield advertised the free, three-day showcase in May through social media and encouraged local charities to invite their board members. She says they sent a total of 3,500



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—Randy Fifield, Vice Chairman and Principal, Fifield Cos.



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Instead, 1,500 attended the Wednesday-Friday showcase. The event was so popular that it was extended into the weekend, attracting an additional 200 attendees. No one was turned away.

“The first night we ordered food for 200 and our caterer was running back and forth with more food and wine,” recalls Fifield, who served complimentary peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and glasses of milk, as well as appetizers such as meatballs and vegetable trays.

“Everyone was enjoying themselves so much that we had to close the building the first two nights just to get people to leave. On Friday, we let everyone stay until midnight.”

From Vision to Reality

Although no leases were signed on the spot, Fifield says that wasn’t the point of the showcase. “We didn’t rush anyone,” she says. “Fifty leases were signed that month, though. Every broker in town, every friend—everyone was talking about the showcase. The K2 brand was palpable.”

K2 resident Suzanne Meshkati says she was looking to move but hadn’t yet settled on a neighborhood when she received an invitation to the showcase.

“The event was extremely well done and I especially enjoyed walking through at my own pace without the hard sales pitch,” she says. “I loved the design variations and came away with some great ideas of my own. K2 embodied luxury living.”

After the event, Meshkati says K2 became her point of comparison. She says she looked at 10 other communities that couldn’t compare, and signed a lease within a week of the showcase.

There was no budget for the event, which was “invented” as Fifield went along. She says the company had to pay to print the invitations and reimbursed the designers for any costs associated with their showcases. Local businesses and charities donated food, beer and chocolate.

Patrick Trask, Central Region Director for Wood Partners, says the public’s response surpassed everyone’s expectations.

“It really helped build the leasing momentum that has carried the building into the summer months,” he says. “As the word begins to spread from our residents, we expect this velocity to continue for the foreseeable future.”

Fifield says she’s already planning a similar event for another community grand opening.

“It caught on like wild fire,” Fifield says. “We gave people a vision of what their living space and life could be. On the operations side, every person involved in the showcase was elbow-to-elbow with one another and positive about the entire experience. It was so energizing to do something with our hearts. When you’re authentic, it shines through.” —*L.B.*