

DOWNTOWN, EVERYTHING'S WAITING FOR YOU

Q&A WITH KRIS MICHELL

The world has changed mightily since Petula Clark sang about the joys of being downtown, but the impulse to be “where all the lights are bright” has never been stronger. Kris Michell, president and CEO of the Downtown San Diego Partnership, aims to make our downtown a smash hit. A native San Diegan, she served as chief of staff for two mayors (Jerry Sanders and Susan Golding). For the nonprofit advocacy group, she oversees a number of programs and initiatives that are strategically creating a world-class urban center. The Clean & Safe program is a 24/7 effort to remove graffiti and sweep the streets. The Healthy Living program brought 400 people to the flight deck of the USS *Midway* for yoga. The work is paying off. The prestigious Brookings Institution think tank has named downtown’s East Village an “Innovation District,” a title that acts like catnip for startups and businesses looking for a new home.

What's Downtown San Diego Partnership's most pressing concern?

Making sure we're taking advantage of the markets. It's on fire right now; and it's fantastic. Over the last five years, we've

seen growth that we have not seen in years. The markets are cyclical, so we want to make sure we are well positioned to take advantage of it.

And we're talking about vertical growth?

Yes, that's exactly what it is. San Diego can no longer grow out; we must grow up. And so now we're going to do it literally. The residents, businesses — everyone wants growth. Unlike 30 years ago when you were building a master-plan community where maybe growth was somewhat controversial, in downtown San Diego, it's really welcomed. And we're seeing this flood back to urban centers all over. According to the U.S. Census Bureau [2011 data], for the first time in 100 years, urban growth outpaced suburban growth.

Are young people leading that return to urban centers?

It's being led by millennials. There was a study in which college graduates were asked where they wanted their first jobs to be. In 2001, 64 percent said an urban center downtown. Ten years later, it was over 94 percent. And people who live here are passionate about doing things and being active in the community. Downtown is not just a location; it's a movement.

