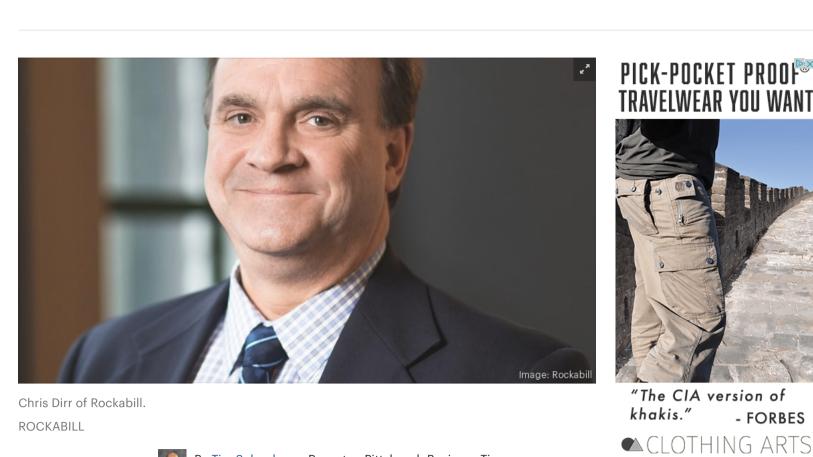
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By Tim Schooley – Reporter, Pittsburgh Business Times Feb 15, 2023 **IN THIS ARTICLE** As he starts a new job in which one of his main goals is to work to bring new affordable housing to Pittsburgh, Chris Dirr can point to a personal

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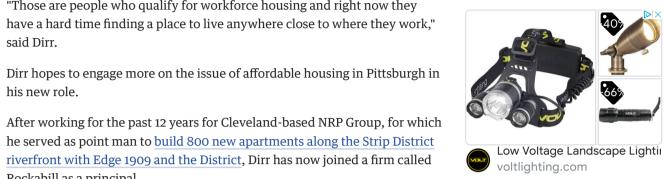
Dirr said his daughter is a nurse at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh in Lawrenceville and that many of the people she works with can't afford to live in close proximity of the hospital due to escalating rents and real estate values.

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"Those are people who qualify for workforce housing and right now they have a hard time finding a place to live anywhere close to where they work," said Dirr.

After working for the past 12 years for Cleveland-based NRP Group, for which he served as point man to build 800 new apartments along the Strip District

riverfront with Edge 1909 and the District, Dirr has now joined a firm called Rockabill as a principal. First Look: Edge 1909



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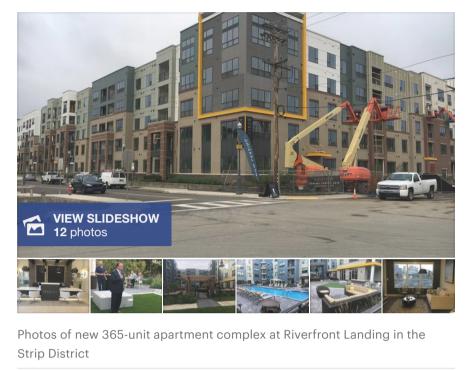
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Rockabill, based in New York, specializes in consulting and developing apartment projects that are affordable.

It's a line of work that Dirr, trained as a lawyer, expressed a bit of regret he didn't get to pursue with NRP in Pittsburgh, where the company successfully built and later sold the Ascent 430 project in Warrendale along with bringing new residential life to the riverfront in the Strip.

Photos: Ascent 430 sold to new owners



See inside the 319-unit complex, built in 2015, featuring 17 three-story residential buildings with a 2,500-square-foot fitness center, large conference room and clubhouse featuring a pool table among other amenities.

"One of the things that was interesting and frustrating to me at the same time is NRP is a large affordable housing developer as well," said Dirr, of his tenure with a company that consistently ranks among the top five largest apartment owners in the United States. "In the time that we developed over 1,100 units in greater Pittsburgh, we were unable to develop any affordable."

Dirr said he sees a major need for affordable housing in Pittsburgh,

rental rates of about 80% of area median income. In Pittsburgh, that translates to apartments affordable to renters at incomes of a little under \$45,000 for a single person to just under a household income of \$65,000 for a family of four. As he takes on a new role with Rockabill in which he's charged with a territory of upstate New York and the entirety of Pennsylvania, Dirr said the

particularly for what he called workforce housing, which he defined as at

one of the things that drove me to pivot slightly and focus most of my "We tried a number of times in Pittsburgh but we just couldn't get any traction," said Dirr of NRP's pursuit of affordable housing projects here. "It was easier for us to develop the high-end market-leading properties that we

did there."

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chance to focus on developing affordable housing in Pittsburgh was "really

Whatever Pittsburgh's perception as a place of affordable living, Dirr sees a greater need here for new affordable housing projects than in other places in which he's worked.

"I think that maybe that need is more pronounced in Pittsburgh than in some

other markets because there's been so much focus on the delivery of highend apartments," he said, adding, "and they're all leasing up great." Dirr is just getting started and didn't have any specific plans in Pittsburgh as

of yet with Rockabill. How Rockabill will become involved in affordable housing here is an open question, with the firm capable of pursuing its own developments as well as

consulting or providing financing support to others as well. Dirr also emphasized the various ways in which Rockabill can serve as a funding source for projects, through such approaches as recapitalizing established apartment buildings as affordable as well as investing to extend the life of affordable housing developments.

downtown, where the administration of Mayor Ed Gainey and the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership have been working to establish a new conversion fund to help turn obsolete and mature office buildings into apartments.

He added he's also open to considering involvement with projects

in Rockabill projects with new interest in Pittsburgh.

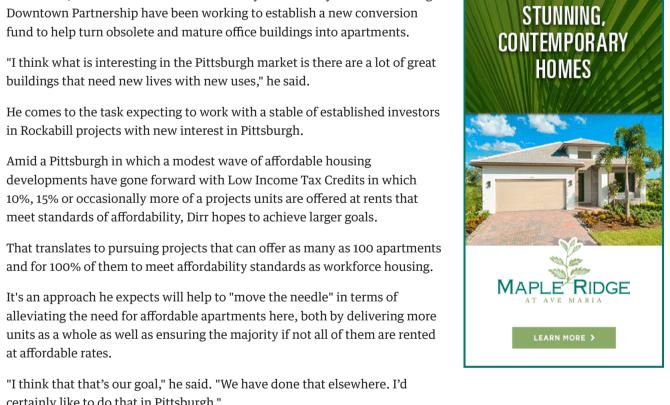
"I think what is interesting in the Pittsburgh market is there are a lot of great buildings that need new lives with new uses," he said.

Amid a Pittsburgh in which a modest wave of affordable housing developments have gone forward with Low Income Tax Credits in which 10%, 15% or occasionally more of a projects units are offered at rents that

meet standards of affordability, Dirr hopes to achieve larger goals. That translates to pursuing projects that can offer as many as 100 apartments and for 100% of them to meet affordability standards as workforce housing.

It's an approach he expects will help to "move the needle" in terms of alleviating the need for affordable apartments here, both by delivering more units as a whole as well as ensuring the majority if not all of them are rented at affordable rates.

"I think that that's our goal," he said. "We have done that elsewhere. I'd certainly like to do that in Pittsburgh." Fitzgerald administration announces new CONTENT affordable housing pilot



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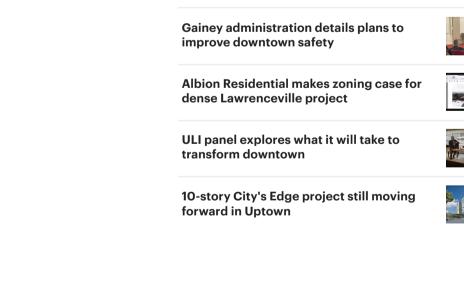
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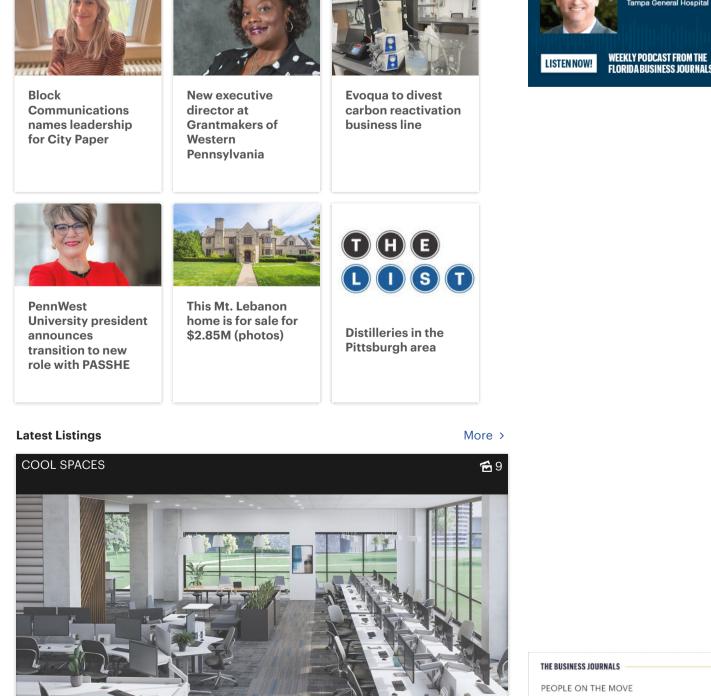
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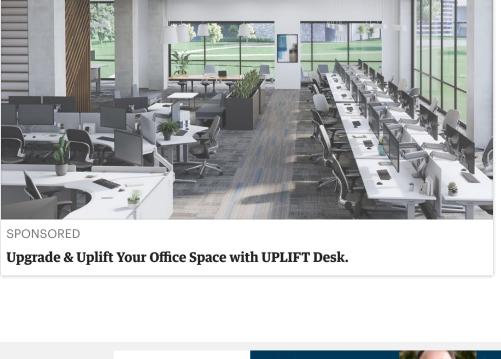
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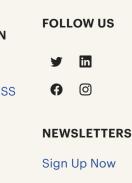
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