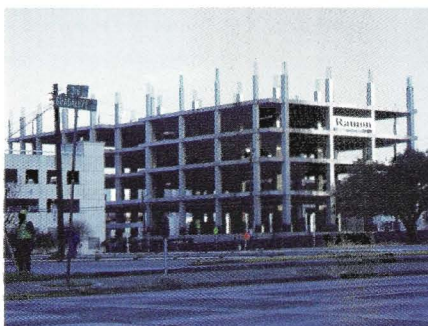


Implosion Finishes Unfinished Intel Shell

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by Eileen Schwartz

The last symbol of Austin's tech boom-gone-bust bites the dust.



Twelve seconds after Michael P. McGill pushed the button on a sunny Sunday morning, the unfinished Intel building – an eyesore in downtown Austin for six years – finally came down in a \$1.3-million implosion which experts deemed a complete success.

"The project came down exactly as we designed it to and reacted exactly the way we thought it would," says Timothy Ramon, director of operations for J.R. Ramon & Sons Inc., the San Antonio-based demolition company that conducted the implosion. "We feel it was a very successful project. None of the debris left the site, other than fly rock, which was anticipated."

The implosion brought down most of the four-story Intel shell, but large portions of outer columns remained intact. Ramon says this was according to plan. "The goal was to bring the shell down to a safe level so work could be done on it without debris spilling onto surrounding streets," he says.

Neither the large columns nor other remaining debris are going to spill onto the street, Ramon says, declaring the site to be safe. "We do have a concern on Nueces Street about a small rock or debris getting loose and bouncing over the fence. So the northbound lane between Fourth and Fifth streets on Nueces remains closed."



TOP LEFT: Isolated and empty, the shell awaits its fate. TOP RIGHT: Michael McGill (front, center), gets last-minute briefing on pushing the button. BOTTOM: The show begins. (Photos by Eileen Schwartz.)

The Intel shell, which had no roof, couldn't collapse under its own weight, says Caesar Arizpe, president of the Austin-based Arizpe Group Inc. of engineers and architects. "Usually after a blast the weight of the building pulls it all the way down," Arizpe says. "There wasn't enough weight on this building to do that. As you can see, it imploded in towards the center to heights that workers can reach when they start taking it down completely."

Arizpe's firm provided the early civil engineer and design services for the project, including traffic control, surveying and utilities facilitation. It will resurvey the site once it's cleared and provide final drawings to the architect for the federal court house to be built on the old Intel property. Removing the 20,000 tons of left-over debris is expected to take two months.

Intel built the four-story shell in >>

Industry Events



The shell buckles, marking the end of an era
(Photo by Eileen Schwartz.)

downtown Austin (near San Antonio and Fifth Streets) in 2000 at the height of Austin's dot-com boom and abandoned it in 2001 when the boom went bust. Developers and city and state officials debated several years over how to recoup this loss. Finally, in 2004 the General Services Administration bought the property where it will build the \$65-million

federal courthouse by 2012.

But it was Feb. 25, 2007, before the large, ugly shell, which some citizens called "a cement dinosaur," finally bit the dust.

A crowd of dignitaries, local residents, reporters, photographers and other onlookers, equipped with cameras, coffee mugs and blankets, had gathered by 7 a.m. to witness the historic event area. "Don't you have nothing better to do on a Sunday morning?" an officer asked the crowd, jokingly.

But it was, indeed, an historic event. Implosions of this magnitude are few and far between. "Less than one percent of all demolitions throughout the world are done by implosion," says Ramon.

The big implosion of the Intel shell, which occurred about 7:30 a.m., took only 12 seconds but it produced a series of loud bangs and sent clouds of dust rolling over the area.

McGill, an Austin resident and employee of

Freescale Semiconductor Inc., had won a raffle that gave him the honor of detonating 700 pounds of dynamite by depressing a button. "I've been doing one-finger push-ups," he said, describing how he prepared for the event.

The crowd cheered when the skeleton of a building crumbled. Not only was it an eyesore, but, some saw it as an unwelcome symbol of failure.

Sally Ann Fly, executive director AIA Austin, says that downtown revitalization began in 1991, after AIA Austin and the city of Austin hosted the R/UDAT (Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team).

"In the past six to eight years the growth and development in downtown Austin has been dramatic," she says. "The empty shell of the Intel building truly was the reminder of times past and perhaps even of the fragile nature of the economy and its effect on urban redevelopment." <<

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