

## Arena District to fill last gap with new office tower, parking garage

BY BRIAN R. BALL | BUSINESS FIRST

Nationwide Realty Investors Ltd. is primed to fill the last major parcel in the Arena District with a six-story office building and parking garage complex. Nationwide Realty Investors Ltd. is primed to fill the last major parcel in the Arena District with a six-story office building and parking garage complex, completing its ambitious plan for a residential and commercial district laid out when Nationwide Arena opened in 2000.

A commitment from Columbia Gas of Ohio Inc. to anchor the 280,000-square-foot office building at the corner of Neil Avenue and Nationwide Boulevard convinced the developer to move ahead on the project, scheduled for completion in late 2014.

"This building essentially completes the commercial component of the original Arena District master plan," said Nationwide Realty President **Brian Ellis**. "This project will take up the vast majority of the remaining ground."

The \$50 million project will include a parking garage with at least 1,400 spots to make up for the 525-spot surface parking lot that will be lost to the construction. Ellis said a construction timetable hasn't been finalized and the parking garage may get started first.

"We're still looking at the sequencing," he said. "We don't need to start construction immediately to meet Columbia Gas' needs."

The office complex would be the largest built so far in the Arena District, surpassing the **Jones Day** law firm-anchored building at 325 **John H. McConnell** Blvd., which has 165,000 square feet of space.

It will sit directly across Nationwide Bou-

levard from Jones Day and a five-story, 95,000-square-foot office building anchored by the San Francisco-based engineering firm **URS Corp.**

The project is contingent on Columbus City Council approving a 10-year, 75-percent tax abatement on the investment.

Legislation is set for introduction on April 11.

### 'Great place to grow'

Columbia Gas, a division of Merrillville, Ind.-based utility NiSource Inc., plans to take at least 208,000 square feet when it moves its 650 employees out of leased offices at 200 Civic Center Drive in the RiverSouth District downtown.

Ellis said the building will have two contiguous floors with an additional 20,000 square feet on each floor available to Columbia Gas if needed.

"Columbia Gas really wanted to make sure the project was multitenant, so we sized it accordingly," he said. "We think the Arena District is a great place to grow."

The company asked Nationwide to build additional space in case it expands its downtown operations, including information technology and financial functions as well as a control center for NiSource gas distribution in seven states and centralized dispatch operations for five states.

"The main thing is we've been able to build in flexibility in terms of what our needs



Rendering courtesy Lupton Rausch Architects Inc.

may be and cover any eventuality in terms of growth," said Columbia Gas President **Jack Partridge**.

Columbia Gas moved into the 14-story, 240,000-square-foot RiverSouth building when it was completed in 1983. Partridge said the building layout is less efficient than what they'll get in the Arena District and it was not pre-wired for technology lines when it was built.

A coming lease expiration in December 2014 prompted NiSource's corporate real estate department to begin looking for options.

Partridge said the company considered new development land and buildings in Dublin and New Albany, as well as Easton in the city of Columbus.

"We tried to look at every option out there and each option had attractive aspects," he said. "(But) the Arena District is where we ended up."