

greenwich time

With ceremony, Greenwich developer finalizes UConn deal, husband's legacy

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For Helen Nitkin, the ceremony in Hartford on Tuesday afternoon was highly emotional.

Seated at a table before the old [Hartford Times](#) building, she signed papers that helped formalize the [University of Connecticut's](#) plans to relocate its West Hartford campus to downtown Hartford -- a project whose development belongs to her Greenwich-based firm, [The HB Nitkin Group](#).

It also marked a crucial step toward the realization of her late husband [Bradley Nitkin's](#) vision for the heart of the state capital, she said.

"He stood many times in front of that building, admiring it for its architectural interest and beauty," Nitkin said Tuesday evening.

"He always imagined that this would be the cornerstone of the redevelopment of downtown Hartford, and he could envision what we are creating now," she said.

Long road

Helen and Bradley Nitkin created The HB Nitkin Group in the mid-'80s. Several years later, Helen stepped back from its operations to focus on raising their children, she said.

The firm today has a portfolio of 13 retail and office projects, located across Connecticut and in White Plains, N.Y. It owns, for example, the [Greenwich Financial Center](#) at 1 Fawcett Place.

In 2005, the firm was selected to develop Hartford's Front Street District, the final phase of Adriaen's Landing, an ambitious state and privately-funded master project that includes the [Connecticut Convention Center](#), [Connecticut Science Center](#) and Marriott Hartford Hotel.



Photo: Contributed Photo
Greenwich developer Helen Nitkin,
head of HB Nitkin Group.

A year later, though, Bradley Nitkin was diagnosed with gastric cancer. Looking to help, Helen Nitkin stepped back into the business, focusing on a couple of other projects, at first. Then, in 2009, Bradley Nitkin died of the cancer.

"When he passed away, I made a commitment to him that I would continue the firm for the people who worked with us for many years," Nitkin said Tuesday. "Our children may come in at some point." Hartford journey

Due, in part, to the financial crisis, the first phase of the Front Street District project wasn't completed until 2011.

It includes about 65,000 square feet of restaurant and entertainment space. Today, there is a four-screen movie theater, several restaurants including a Capital Grille, and a music hall that's slated to open this summer.

Phase two is currently underway. It will include 121-market rate apartments and 14,000 square feet of commercial space. It's scheduled to be finished in late 2015, Nitkin said.

Between those two phases, construction costs will total about \$75 million, Nitkin said. Her firm continues to own the properties.

Phase three is the UConn project at the former Hartford Times building. School officials decided to relocate the West Hartford campus to the downtown area last summer. But the project was only finalized with the ceremony Tuesday.

The project will retain the building's iconic facade, but will add to the building a new atrium and a five-story building, the university said in a statement. UConn will own the building upon completion, but it will also build out 20,000 square feet of restaurant space to which HB Nitkin will have the master leasing rights, Nitkin said.

The school expects the campus to be ready for students by fall 2017. It should be home to about 2,300 students and 250 faculty members, the school said in a statement.

"After months of preliminary work, due diligence and planning, the vision for a UConn campus in downtown Hartford can now be a reality," University President [Susan Herbst](#) said in a statement Tuesday. "Its original mission was to provide an urban educational setting for our students, and for the city -- and it soon will again."

For Nitkin, who drove home to Greenwich Tuesday afternoon, the day provided a sense of relief and pride.

"It was a very important day for our firm, and for UConn, and also for the legacy of my husband," she said.

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