

ALL THAT JAZZ AND MORE

Popular annual Portland festival welcomes Freda Payne — SEE LIFE, B1

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Bob Ball finds his balance

Portland developer revels in spending time with his son, Parker, and his building of the same name

By JOSEPH GALLIVAN
The Tribune

Bob Ball walks around the apartment building named after his toddler son, Parker, and none of the tenants know who he is. They greet his adorable child with oohs and ahhs almost as enthusiastic as those they reserve for each other's pet dogs.

Ball seems to enjoy the anonymity, asking do they use the first-floor community room, the courtyard fire pits or the dog washing station?

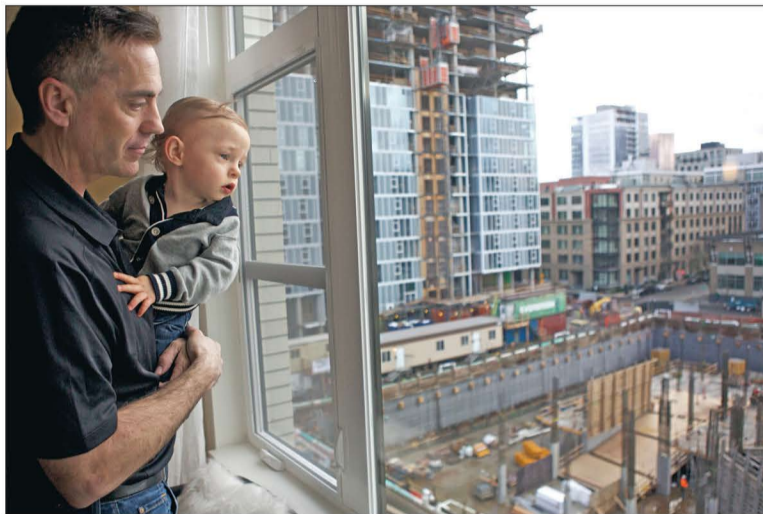
The Parker represents a fortunate man's latest gamble. Ball got out of the market in 2008, selling The Wyatt, his condo building at Northwest 13th and Lovejoy, when he sensed the real estate market peaking. Six months later, the Lehman Brothers meltdown brought on the Great Recession. The group that bought the Wyatt had to turn it from condos to apartments. Ball watched the meltdown from a distance, with a mixture of fear

and relief.

The Parker apartments opened last November, ahead of a six-pack of buildings being built in contiguous blocks in the North end of the Pearl District. Ball gives a chuckle as he contemplates his advantage. After getting out early, he got back in early too. As of early February it is 70 percent full — a milestone that wasn't expected to be reached until May.

"We moved the model unit over to this side of the building," he says, bouncing baby Parker in his arms. "Because where else

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TRIBUNE PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ

Portland real estate developer Bob Ball and his son Parker look from the model unit of The Parker apartment building in the Pearl District. The window overlooks the site of the Overton Apartments, which will block his view but have to play catch up when it comes to finding renters.

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Portland developer Bob Ball and his son Parker outside The Parker apartment building in the Pearl District. The building was named after the child.

TRIBUNE PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ

Ball: If the mayor called, he would answer

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can you get to see a city being built before your eyes?"

The window of the model unit looks down into the pit of the Overton Apartments. Construction crews are working a Saturday, with cranes hefting the steelwork of what will be a 26-floor tower into place. By the time it blocks the Parker's view south (obscuring The Wyatt and downtown) The Parker will probably be full with a waiting list.

Ball takes a personal interest in how his developments look. He was inspired to add exterior lights to The Wyatt after sitting in New York's Central Park at dusk and seeing the city light up.

"There's always been a part of me that wished I'd gone to New York and taken on the big city, coming from a very rural background, Knappa outside Astoria."

For the Parker he chose the art deco styling to give Jazz Age classiness. The residents had a Great Gatsby-themed party where they each received a copper mug for their Moscow Mules. He programs the colored LEDs himself on his laptop. Original, local art hangs in the hallways, including paintings named for Parker and his deceased twin Wyatt. The artist read the boys' story on Facebook and felt moved to paint.

To protect his son's delicate lungs from colds and infections, Ball elbow bumps rather than shakes hands, and no one who has been on a plane in the last

three days can enter their home.

When Ball and his partner Grant Jones decided they wanted children they found a surrogate mother. After one miscarriage, she conceived twins, who were born dangerously early at 26 weeks.

"Parker was 1 pound, 10 ounces. I could fit my wedding ring totally around his arm." Over an hour, he tells the story of Parker and Wyatt's birth and Wyatt's death, referring to pictures on Facebook as he goes. Incubators, baptisms, funeral, brag book ... Ball wears his heart on his sleeve as he talks about his boys.

"In the middle of building this I'd get up at four in the morning, come here make sure everything got done with the building. Then go to the hospital in the afternoon and hold them on my chest with my shirt off." He did this for 80 straight days.

When it became clear Wyatt would not make it, the fathers took his air mask off, carried him to the hospital courtyard to see the flowers and sun for the first time, then back into the chapel where he died in their hands within 10 minutes.

The Sept. 11, 2013 funeral for the six-week-old baby was big. Despite being lapsed Catholics, they secured St. Mary's Cathedral. Mayor Hales came, as did many police and civic leaders. Police supplied a security detail in case Ball's stalker showed up.

Clearly Jones and Ball have a lot of friends, and Ball still has political capital. In 2008, Ball's hopes of being mayor were sunk when

he clashed with candidate Sam Adams over the Beau Breedlove affair.

Asked about his political ambitions, Ball answers emphatically, "Zero. Zero. I have zero desire. Never say never but it's the last thing in the world I'd want to do right now. I just wouldn't want that life." He is happy being a hands on co-parent to Parker, CEO of Astor Pacific and a reserve commander in the Portland Police reserves.

He qualifies this. "I've figured out I can still have an impact by taking on one issue and seeing it through," such as the future of the Portland Building or the Mounted Patrol Unit. "If the mayor calls and says 'Can you do this?' and I feel like I can do a good job, then I'm in."

He wishes he had held on to some of his rentals, like his hero, Joe Weston. "It's income, it's retirement," he says.

Astor Pacific just closed on a property near Caffé Mingo on Northwest 21st Avenue. He hasn't started "drawing" yet but he expects it'll be a four story, 35-unit apartment with corner retail. It might be done in 18 months. It's a small project by any standard, but he expects to bring his own special touch to it. During The Parker's construction he was all over the building, checking on quality control. Up on the roof one day, inside the capstone he took a black Sharpie and wrote "Bob and Grant forever" in a heart, before it was sealed up. "This is not the Taj Mahal, I get that, but I think it's beautiful."