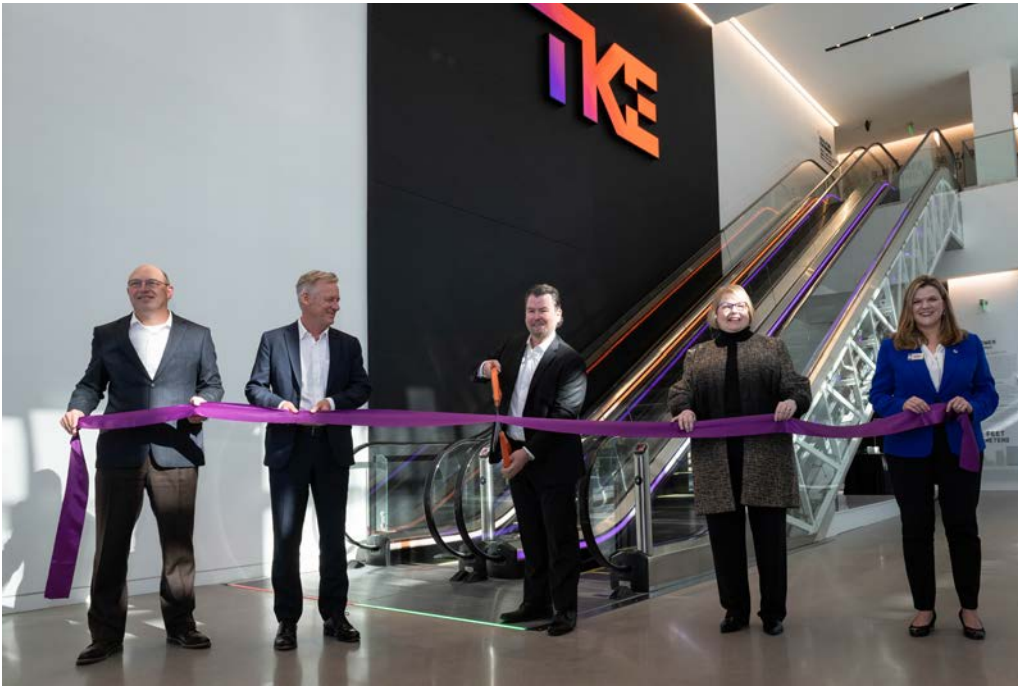


TKE North America debuts HQ in Atlanta, a US\$200-million investment that promises to reverberate throughout the community and beyond.

GAME CHANGER



◊ (l-r) The IQC lights up the night sky at The Battery Atlanta; photo courtesy of TKE.



◊ (l-r) TKE North America CFO Steve Wedge, TKE CEO Peter Walker, TKE North America CEO Kevin Lavallee, TKE North America Chief Human Resources Office Shari Lotz and Cobb County Chamber of Commerce President Sharon Mason cut the ribbon; photo courtesy of TKE.

by Kaija Wilkinson

The excitement in Gensler Principal Jerry Alexander's voice on the afternoon of February 9 prior to flipping the switch to turn on the LED mesh light system on TK Elevator's (TKE) new test tower in Atlanta – part of formal ceremonies to welcome TKE's new North American headquarters (HQ) – was palpable. With a team that included TKE and local manufacturers and installers, Alexander and his Gensler colleagues collaborated with TKE on the eight-story, 11,000-ft² LED system spanning three sides of the building that now lights up the sky overlooking The Battery – home of Major League Baseball's Atlanta Braves. "The unique system is going to be such a great tool for our company," TKE Public Relations Manager Dennis Van Milligen said. "Everything you're seeing here was brought to life by [Alexander], Gensler and TKE's North American branding team."

The "everything" to which Van Milligen was referring represents an approximately US\$200-million investment in the new HQ, formally welcomed during a ceremony that drew more than 200 attendees – including Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, TKE CEO Peter Walker, Braves Development Co. President and CEO Mike Plant, TKE North America President and CEO Kevin Lavallee, current and former TKE executives and heads of various chambers of commerce and economic development organizations – to Cobb County on a sunny, chilly, windy afternoon. As the wind ripped through corridors outside between the HQ and the Three Ballpark Center office complex, natural light poured into the Gensler-designed Innovation and Qualification Center (IQC), which includes a high-tech customer

showroom with interactive informational stations where people can learn about everything from the birth of cities and rise of urbanization to specific TKE products, like MULTI, TWIN and AGILE; an 18-shaft, 420-ft-tall elevator test tower – the tallest in North America; and what Van Milligen described as "one of the coolest parts": a cavernous testing and qualification lab that can be observed through floor-to-ceiling windows adjoining the showroom above, which fits with one of TKE's core principles: transparency.

In the lab, where up to 20 R&D International Technical Services (ITS) professionals work at one time, Van Milligen said: "Our engineers test our latest elevator innovations, including our high-speed elevators that move at the speed of a top

Continued



◊ One of the tours; photo courtesy of TKE



◇ Guests check out a showroom display; photo courtesy of TKE.

Olympic sprinter. A really interesting part of the testing process is that TKE can test elevators in numerous conditions including humidity, temperature and vibration to ensure they can hold up in the most extreme situations. Beyond testing, we qualify our elevators to ensure they meet all applicable codes in North America.”

Your author’s day began prior to the 3 p.m. ribbon cutting with a private tour conducted by Van Milligen before the group tours that would occur later that day. She got an up-close look at the informational stations, research lab and test tower. The tower is outfitted with a mesh LED light system designed by Peachtree Corners, Georgia-based Nanolumens, according to *LEDs Magazine*, to suit not only passersby looking in but also elevator passengers looking out. A custom aluminum armature and LED mesh configuration means that when the LEDs are off – as they were during your author’s visit – the mesh is largely indiscernible.^[1] In addition to the surrounding scenery, she and Van Milligen were also able to check out the inner workings in the hoistways through clear glass.

During the ribbon cutting, Lavallee, Walker, TKE North America Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Steve Wedge and Cobb County Chamber CEO Sharon Mason gathered to share a few words and cut a purple ribbon with the “big scissors” in the lobby, decorated with elaborate orange and purple (TKE logo colors) flower arrangements and balloons and featuring a glass escalator lit from the inside with bright orange and purple. The escalator includes informational signage describing its various parts and capabilities. Members of the press, camera crews and people in suits milled about. The ribbon cutting was followed by a cocktail and heavy hors d’oeuvres reception in an adjoining room featuring handsome TKE ice sculptures, a signature TKE orange cocktail with an edible purple flower and everything from pulled-pork sandwiches and chicken and waffles to crab claws, filet mignon and shrimp ceviche. A live band played in one corner. Guests then repaired to the adjoining ballroom on the fourth floor of the IQC to listen to words from Lavallee, Kemp, Plant, Mason and Metro Atlanta Chamber President and CEO Katie Kirkpatrick.

“ The people on [TKE North America CEO Kevin Lavallee’s team] — had a vision during a time that many others didn’t even know what an elevator test tower was. ”

— Braves Development Co. President and CEO Mike Plant

The IQC is rounded out by more than 205,000 ft² of office space, including in a new TKE building next to the test tower and another, 155,000-ft² in an 11-story building across the breezeway shared with pizza franchise Papa John’s, which recently relocated its own HQ to Three Ballpark Center. TKE’s North American HQ “offers an ideal setting for innovation and flexible collaboration to more than 900 TKE employees,” according to the OEM. “By integrating both administration and technology at the new HQ, the company will ensure even stronger cooperation between these functions and leverage synergy to an optimum.”

The IQC received its certificate of occupancy in October 2021, although employees started moving in to the adjacent Corporate Headquarters earlier in 2021 and the Business Headquarters in nearby Pennant Park in 2019. Van Milligen said it took several weeks to transfer all the needed equipment from the former test tower in Horn Lake, Mississippi, to Atlanta. Already, more than 730 TKE employees work on-site, with employment expected to top the 900 mark later this year. Van Milligen said:

“We wanted the public to get the full experience. It’s been essentially done, but we’ve been making minor tweaks and modifications since October. In addition to getting everything in place and making it fully operational, we also wanted the opening to coincide with completion of the LED mesh, which occurred recently.”

Culmination of a Long Journey

It’s been a lengthy, nearly decade-long journey from when The Battery, Truist Park and the TKE HQ and test tower did not exist in the bustling place it is today. For the HQ grand opening, your author stayed at the Omni Hotel at The Battery, which opened in early 2018. At first unbeknownst to her, the hotel’s third floor opens onto The Battery itself, which has become a bustling entertainment district reminiscent of Disney World’s Main Street USA, with not only the baseball stadium but restaurants, shops and a concert venue along brick-paved pedestrian streets.



◊ TKE colors were on full display; photo courtesy of TKE.

Thanking Lavallee for the impact he and his team are creating with “top-notch, world-class innovation,” Plant shared with the ballroom crowd during his turn at the podium that he remembers when TKE executives “traveled over from Germany ages ago and walked through the woods in their boots with the vision that we could create this amazing place and change the landscape of not only Cobb County, but the entire state.”

Back then, what was considered a sleepy part of Cobb County – roughly 12 mi. north of downtown Atlanta – was distinguished by a “pile of dirt,” Plant said. He said, “Yes, we are in the real estate development business, but we are also in the World Series business,” referring to the Braves’ 2021 victory. Kemp also pointed to the University of Georgia Bulldogs winning the National Championship in college football over the University of Alabama’s Crimson Tide, prompting applause and cheers. Plant said:

“I think we’ve got a track record of winning that promises to build on the success here. [Economic development officials] used to pound on us about the big pile of dirt and debris across from The Battery. But the people on [Lavallee’s team] – had a vision during a time that many others didn’t even know what an elevator test tower was. [Braves Development, TKE and economic development officials] went back and forth for about six months. At first, it was 150 employees, then 250. Eventually, we got to the point where this became the North American HQ, and our shared vision got a lot bigger. It shows what we can do working together. There was a rule for many years against building anything taller than 300 ft in Cobb County, but look at what is now in front of us. The day we announced the test tower, a bunch of developers said, ‘You can’t do that.’ But we worked hard with the [Federal Aviation Administration] and others, and look where we are today. [TKE] will be happy bringing its clients here for decades.”



◊ An engineer works in the ITS; photo courtesy of TKE.

Continued



◊ Top-of-the-tower event space will be available to rent later this year; photo courtesy of TKE.



◊ Informational displays include an abstract representation of segmented TWIN elevator system; photos by Kaija Wilkinson

TKE will not be the only ones. Also coming to the HQ will be vertical-transportation (VT) apprentices, grade-school children for field trips, and professionals and citizens renting either the fourth-floor ballroom or the event space at the top of the test tower. Alexander says Gensler plans to have its Christmas party there, and the spaces will also be available for companies to host business meetings. Top-of-the-tower parties and events looking out over an incredible landscape will also be possible, Van Milligen said. The space will be available to rent later this year, he said, and any event will be one that “fits with the company’s vision and values.”

Alexander said the light-filled top-of-the-tower space was part and parcel of the HQ design. He said:

“When we were designing this building, the idea was to celebrate the elevator. That’s why the test tower was designed with a glass façade so people can see the elevators moving up and down. But then we thought, at the top, we should have something, because, I mean, look at the views. You can see [Dobbins Air Reserve Base] with all the planes flying around, which is amazing.”

During your author’s trip to the top of the tower, Van Milligen pointed out various points of interest near and far. Only a few blocks away is the rooftop of the Sheraton Suites Galleria where cameras for a timelapse video to document HQ construction sat. One can also look down almost directly into the baseball stadium. Farther in the distance, we could see the downtown Atlanta skyline wrought in miniature — like toys, the stylish Buckhead residential district and mountains including Stone Mountain, where your author and Van Milligen attended a concert and hiked, respectively, on separate occasions years ago.



This is a historic moment for TKE and a major step on our journey to the next size company we’re going to be — not just locally, but globally.” — TKE North America CEO Kevin Lavallee



◊ Downtown Atlanta viewed from the top of the tower; photo by Kaija Wilkinson

Why Atlanta?

During his turn at the podium, Lavallee said choosing Atlanta to “plant the TKE flag” had a lot to do with its higher-education community and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) culture. He said:

“I’ve always been excited about innovation in elevators, and think elevators and escalators are the most fascinating things in the world. Most people don’t think about VT, but hopefully, they will now because they’ll see the tower. This is a very technology-focused industry, and its growth is going to depend on the STEM disciplines. When you think about the great colleges and universities we have here – some of the greatest in the U.S. – we couldn’t pick a better place to be. So, on behalf of the thousands of men and women that have worked with us, have retired from us, are still working today or are going to be future employees, we say, ‘Thank you.’”

Those future employees will likely be trained on the third floor, where the International Technical Center, or ITS, is located. There, TKE engineers also train and perform reverse engineering to enable them to work on competitors’ equipment. Addressing the crowd in the ballroom, Lavallee said:

“What a wonderful day – probably the best day in 2022, and maybe even 2021 and 2020, considering all we’ve been through. It’s a testament to getting through those tough times to be standing here today in this building, which is a great reflection of our partners who helped build it on time through the pandemic. This is a historic moment for TKE and a major step on our journey to the next size company we’re going to be – not just locally, but globally.”

Reference

[1] Lau, Wanda. “TK Elevator’s New Headquarters Features a Massive LED Display,” *LEDs Magazine*, February 16, 2022.

TKE North America HQ, Major Players

- Architect:** Gensler
- General contractor:** Brasfield & Gorrie
- Landowner:** Braves Development Co.
- Project manager/landowner representative:** Impact Development Management (formerly Darden & Co.)
- Structural engineer:** Walter P. Moore
- Civil engineer:** Kimley-Horn
- LED mesh technology provider:** Nanolumens
- Curtain wall consultant:** Harmon
- Display rigging installer:** Atlanta Rigging
- LED display integrator:** AVI-SPL
- Mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP):** Glumac
- Landscape architect:** OJB