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## **Intelligent Buildings Combines Real Estate Savvy With Technology To Build, Well, Intelligently**

*By Bea Quirk, Special To LTW*

CHARLOTTE, N.C. - At Ballantyne Village, Charlotte's newest lifestyle shopping center, visitors use touch screens to find out where retailers are located and what they've got on sale; watch trailers for movies showing at the third-story movie theater; buy movie tickets at a street-level kiosk; make use of 26 wireless access points located throughout the center; and enjoy coordinated LED light displays from the fountain centerpiece and the top of the 108-foot glass tower that is the center's signature feature.

All these offerings are regulated by a platform from Intelligent Buildings, a real estate services company started by Tom Shircliff and Rob Murchison in 2004. But those very visible services are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what they provide at Ballantyne Village and other mixed-use developments located primarily in the Carolinas. (The company also was selected recently to provide smart building services at the North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis.)

Those other services include temperature and lighting control for improved energy utilization, fiber optics for VOIP, phone service and Internet access, Muzak, digital signage, security, and even smart bathrooms that are monitored so landlords know immediately when supplies run out or a toilet gets clogged.

"It's behind the scene stuff – not sexy," Murchison said in an interview. "But information is the fourth utility after water, electricity and gas."

Added Shircliff: "Real estate is the last frontier of technology. We're using it to differentiate a property and create value for owners. We work with clients during the entire life cycle to create value in the long run."

### **Technology Can Differentiate Properties**

What differentiates Intelligent Buildings is that it combines expertise in both real estate and technology. Murchison, 36, has 10 years of experience in technology, while Shircliff, 40, has a background in real estate upfits.

But this combination requires some innovative selling in an industry where technology is generally viewed with suspicion. "We're using a return-on-investment model," Shircliff said. "We are driving efficiency and turning technology from a liability to an asset. Owners are beginning to embrace technology to differentiate their property. They are realizing it is a tool."

Intelligent Buildings uses a platform for real estate from Cisco Systems that features multiple applications. Owners can use as many as they want and add others later without any additional installation. Shircliff called it "tapping into the spine – we don't build separate systems." He explained that his firm tries to get involved as early as possible in the design and construction stages, working with architects, engineers and even bankers before ground is broken.

“We develop a technology master plan to support the business plan,” Murchison said. The firm determines how to wire the buildings, then oversees its installation and helps maintain it.

### **Services at Ballantyne Village**

George Sheild, owner of Ballantnye Village, “came to us because he wanted to create a wow-factor for the retail,” Murchison said. The mixed-use center in south Charlotte – with 160,000 square feet of retail and 135,000 square feet of office on 10 acres – started with four applications and by the time it opened this spring, was using 12.

The light display atop the 45-foot-wide “crown,” as Sheild calls the tower, features 574 LEDs and can be programmed from a laptop. The music played throughout the center can be controlled by playing with the zone configuration of the speakers. When customers use the touch screens, their choices are tracked, and IP-enabled video surveillance allows their responses to what they see to be monitored. The number of people inside a theater can be detected and the temperature adjusted accordingly.

The platform also provides energy sub-metering so that Sheild’s company automatically knows how much electricity each tenant uses so they can be rebilled for the usage – without Duke Power having to install individual meters or send workers out to read them. All systems have been designed so that when condo towers and a hotel are added, they will be integrated into the existing community.

Shircliff said the biggest factor driving landlords to intelligent building systems is the rising cost of energy. “Landlords are realizing they need to invest more upfront to get a bigger bang in the long run” he said.

**Intelligent Buildings:** [www.intelligentbuildings.com](http://www.intelligentbuildings.com)