

Case Study

Military Base Becomes Newest Community along Chicago's North Shore



Since the early 1980s, military bases across the country have been decommissioned, leaving communities in fear of the potential economic impact. Re-uses for these mothballed installations are as numerous as there are closures, but the project under way at Fort Sheridan, IL, near Chicago, is an architect's dream.

The mostly Romanesque Revival buildings were designed by architects Holabird & Roche in the late 1880s. These are the architects who would later receive worldwide recognition for pioneering the skeletal frame skyscrapers that characterize the Chicago School of Architecture. After the base was decommissioned in 1993, four developers joined forces to create the first new community along Chicago's North Shore in more than 100 years.

Offering panoramic views of Lake Michigan, Fort Sheridan is now a blend of renovated historic structures and new construction. For the last three years, barracks and single dwelling houses have been converted into multi-million dollar mansions and upper six figure townhouses. Under the watchful eye of the Landmark Preservation Council of Illinois, Red Seal Development Corporation, one of the four developers involved in this project, built 24 new townhouses and over 140 single family dwellings.

The Whistler Road townhouses are located adjacent to several renovated historic buildings, making the architectural design critical. "While we didn't have to duplicate the historic structures, we did have to be sympathetic to our surroundings," said Michael Larsen, executive vice president, Red Seal Development Corporation. As part of the design, Red Seal used vinyl windows in all of the homes.

"Windows are a very important factor in the home buying decision," Larsen said. For this project, with practically everyone from the surrounding communities to the state capital watching to see if this reuse concept could be successful, every detail counted. "For the first time, we used a two-tone vinyl window," he said.

The exterior of the windows on the townhouses is a dark forest green while the interior is white; the single-family dwellings' windows have a beige exterior and a white interior. This was critical because the historic district would not allow a white window exterior. The coating process called METREC (Multiple, Environmentally friendly, Thermally, Reflective, External, Coatings) allows the exterior part of a window to be painted in several different color options.



METREC coatings use thermally reflective pigments that have low predicted heat buildup almost equal to the color of white, allowing the use of dark colors. VEKA supplied Republic Windows with these two-toned extruded profiles, which the company then fabricated.

Vinyl windows in a multi-million dollar project? "Why not?" Larsen asked. "There isn't a negative connotation to using vinyl windows on a half million dollar house anymore. Seven or eight years ago we would have been laughed at but not now," he added.

One of the architects involved in the project agrees. "People are looking for maintenance-free homes all the time - even if the homes are over a million dollars," said Brad Lewis, Director of Design, Balsamo Olson & Lewis, based in Chicago. "We are doing a lot of houses with vinyl windows. People can't tell the difference anymore. And now that we can do different shapes with vinyl windows, it gives us a chance to use the material more," Lewis said. "Before, you couldn't get variety; you couldn't match your design that may have called for a curved window with a vinyl square window, so you would go all wood. That's not the case today."

Red Seal's project was a success. What was expected to be a five-year process to sell all their properties was accomplished in two and a half years. The townhomes sold between \$340,000 and \$550,000 and the single-family dwellings sold between \$350,000 and over \$2 million. Red Seal is in the process of building six more townhouses in another location within the fort.