

# LEDs brighten up outlet centers

Advances in lighting have enabled landlords to illuminate their centers, please tenants, become more sustainable and save money.

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**WHAT'S THE WORD** in outlet center lighting? LED, LED, LED. And if you don't believe it, check out the spectacular 700-foot wall of light emblazoned on three sides of the Outlet Collection at Riverwalk in New Orleans. One of dozens of WLS Lighting Systems projects for outlet centers, the LED system at the Howard Hughes Corp. mall moves LED lighting to the next level: Programmable wireless controls create an ever-changing light show running from the Mississippi River on one side to Convention Center Boulevard on the other.

The Outlet Collection at Riverwalk, completely redeveloped at a cost of \$80 million and expanded to 250,000 sf, reopened in May 2014. With the Mississippi side facing berths for cruise ships and the other facing the popular convention area, the center's façade presented an exceptional opportunity to dramatically capture the attention of potential shoppers.

The fast-tracked, 11-month renovation was a bit of a challenge as the color-changing walls had to be precisely programmed, all during construction, in and around other contractors, said Dean Pritchard, president of WLS Lighting Systems.

But handling challenges is just part of each proj-

ect. For example, WLS retrofitted 14 projects in the DDR Corporation Puerto Rico portfolio, switching them to lower wattage and installing a system of programmable lighting controls. That system, known as netLiNK, was developed by WLS in 2009 specifically for shopping centers.

"The DDR project included hundreds of individual light poles and fixtures, plus there was the language barrier," Pritchard said. "But I think it was certainly worthwhile. I think we saved DDR more than \$1 million in utility expense in the first 18 months."

## Outlets keen on LED

In total, Pritchard estimates WLS has about 400 netLiNK systems in place around the country. He notes that Tanger Outlets probably has the most netLiNK systems in its centers, using it to control sidewalk, tenant and common area lighting, plus individual fixtures, music, security, canopy lights, pylon signage and more.

Carl Close, assistant VP-construction for Tanger, said, "The primary reason we elected to try this system was the fact that we had numerous restaurant pads that require certain site lighting to operate on their hours and not on the shopping center operating hours. We also knew that these hours would shift, depending upon the season."

The system, which has been operational at three Tanger Outlet Centers for more than three years, enables lighting to be adjusted pole by pole. It also alerts operators if a bulb or ballast is no longer working.

The marriage of programmable controls with LEDs is also a good choice for centers committed



**Lighting fixtures**, such as these at Horizon Group Properties' Outlet Shoppes at Atlanta, add a touch of atmosphere and keep shoppers shopping at night.

to energy conservation and sustainability. LEDs provide a "whiter" light, so they seem brighter than halite lighting, for example, and the eye sees better in the whiter light, so users can lower their minimum lighting requirements. LEDs use less wattage and last longer than other light sources.

The popularity of LED is growing rapidly, Pritchard said, adding that one lighting manufacturer told him that 53 percent of its production is now LED and 28 percent of commer-

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**WLS installed programmed** displays that wrap around three sides of Howard Hughes Corp.'s Outlet Collection at Riverwalk in New Orleans. The display can even be seen by cruise ships on the Mississippi River.

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cial lighting is using LED.

WLS's latest netLiNK feature enables LED parking lot lighting to be dimmed down to just 10 percent. "Maybe at 10 p.m. they want to dim the lighting down by 50 percent, and maybe at midnight down 75 percent, and at 3 a.m. down 90 percent," he said. "They can use the least amount of energy to maintain good parking lot lighting."



**At Simon's** St. Louis Premium Outlets, LED systems help night-time shoppers feel comfortable at the center.

## Lighting for after-dark sales

Founded in 1969 by Pritchard's parents, Jim and Patsy, WLS Lighting Systems' first major client was Kmart centers. By 1981, Pritchard had attended his first ICSC meeting and was selling WLS lighting products directly to developers and contractors nationwide.

WLS now works with developers, municipalities, hotels, health care centers, office buildings, public projects, first-responder departments, highway departments and even film production. For the 1995 movie Titanic, WLS supplied and installed four monster-sized Airstar light balloons on the ship. On location in the Caribbean for the movie, WLS brought in light balloons – known for providing non-glare light – that ranged from six feet to more than 20 feet in diameter to illuminate up to three acres.

Pritchard's 34 years in the business have given him an unusual perspective on the history of shopping centers.

"The light levels for regional malls in the 1980s were not very bright," said Pritchard, whose company has lighted approximately 6,000 shopping-center parking lots. "Starting in the '90s developers realized that brighter lighting increased sales, so regional mall developers increased their levels to where they are today."



**LED installations** brighten the night for shoppers at Tanger Outlets National Harbor.

"Although most outlet centers didn't have minimum lighting requirements in the '80s and '90s," he said, "today's outlet centers want bright parking lots because they know that's the first and last place a customer sees when shopping. A clean, bright parking lot is very important for the image, the branding of the center, and for increased nighttime shopping." ■