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Q&A with VanTrust's Andy Weeks

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Scott Ziance, a partner with Vorys and chair of the firm's national economic development incentives practice, sat down with Andy Weeks, VanTrust's executive vice president of development, to discuss VanTrust earning the national "Developer of the Year" award from NAIOP, the Commercial Real Estate Development Association, and the company's development and growth strategies.

Weeks leads the VanTrust Columbus office and all phases of the real estate development process for VanTrust in the Ohio Valley region, which includes Cincinnati, Louisville and Indianapolis; and upstate South Carolina. His responsibilities include project feasibility, market analysis, site acquisitions, entitlements and design/construction oversight for new build-to-suit, speculative office, industrial, mixed-use, retail, hospitality and multifamily opportunities.

Ziance: Congratulations to VanTrust on being named NAIOP's National Developer of the Year. That's one of the biggest honors in commercial real estate. What does it mean to you and your colleagues?

Weeks: NAIOP is a premier real estate organizations in the United States. Each year, they go through a complex, deliberate and thorough process to select the "Developer of the Year." So, to be selected is really rewarding, especially because it's our peers making the decision.

Ziance: Historically, most of the companies that have received the "Developer of the Year" distinction have been in the business for decades, whereas VanTrust is only 13 years old. Can you tell us about VanTrust's founding and growth?

Weeks: We were founded in 2010 coming out of the financial crisis which certainly was an interesting time to be starting a real estate development company. But, we slowly grew over time, adding people and opening new offices when it made sense. Over the years, we have partnered with numerous brokers, lenders, contractors, architects – and of course, attorneys – that have helped us grow. We could not have grown to this scale on our own and are lucky to have such great partners.

Ziance: How about the Columbus office? When was it opened, and how has it grown over time?

Weeks: VanTrust was started by Dave Harrison, with whom I had worked at a different development company before VanTrust was founded. When he started the company in May 2010, it had one office in Kansas City, Missouri. Because of my relationship with Dave, I decided to join him and we opened the Columbus office in July 2010. I was by myself in the office for several years but we have grown to a team of 10 full-time employee.

We've made such great progress. In 2021, we were named NAIOP of Central Ohio's "Developer of the Year," and in the 2023 *Business First* listing of the largest developers in the region, we were ranked number one. Our Columbus team has developed projects as diverse as The Pointe at Polaris mixed-use project as well as a million square foot Bath and Body Works distribution center in Pickaway County.

I am extremely proud of the team that we assembled; it is definitely one of my proudest professional achievements. We have very talented and good people that enjoy coming into the office every day to help us achieve our clients' goals.

Ziance: That's incredible growth in such a short period of time. What's VanTrust's secret sauce?

Weeks: First of all, we are fortunate to have the Van Tuyl family as our capital partner. They are a terrific group to work with that is focused on the long run and give us great flexibility to pursue the projects that we choose. We also have a collective success model that emphasizes teamwork above individual success. It is a unique structure in our industry but it has proven to be very successful as we have grown rapidly with minimal turnover.

We also strive to be a great community partner. We have supported numerous non-profits both nationally and locally over the years. In Central Ohio, we have been big supporters of Nationwide Children's Hospital, Columbus Foundation, New Albany Community Foundation, and The Ohio State University Foundation—just to name a few.

Ziance: How does VanTrust decide what kinds of projects it is going to do?

Weeks: We intentionally try to have a diverse product mix, but above all, we stay opportunistic and nimble. We don't go into a year saying we are going to do a certain percentage of one product type or another. We try to find a need that exists in the market and then execute as well as we can. The needs that might exist in one market might be different than the needs of another market, and we understand that.

Ziance: What do the next 13 years hold for VanTrust?

Weeks: We have morphed a couple of times already in the last 13 years. We've grown from a small local developer to a large regional developer with 5 offices throughout the United States. We work on multifamily, industrial and office projects. We also recently launched a new division that is focused on developing science, medical and technology-related buildings. It's difficult to predict where we will be in 13 years, but we're not slowing down.