

Village News

Views from the Heart of Historic Plano

January - February 2006

On The Horizon

The quaintness and true sense of community of Historic Downtown Plano has continued to be a draw for dwellers for some time, evidenced by the fact that the 500 rental properties at Eastside Village remain over 95% occupied since their construction. The City of Plano has further plans in store to assist significantly in revitalizing downtown into the pedestrian-friendly mixed-use community for which it is destined.

On November 28, the City of Plano entered into a contract with Lexington Luxury Builders, LLC to build approximately 100 townhomes ranging in size from 1,500 to 2,500 square feet on the Rice Field property. These units will have tremendous appeal as they will be walking distance from downtown businesses and DART.

Rice Field was built on the southwest corner of 18th Street and Avenue G by the Plano Independent School District. According to "*Plano Independent School District, An Historical Perspective*," by Sherrie S. McLeRoy, "Joy filled the town and soon, money began flowing into sports. The athletic park was a block north of the school once a pasture where the cows were moved out long enough for games to be played. Just the year before, in 1924, the Board had finished paying off the field's purchase price. Now the cows were gone, and the pasture was renamed Rice Field for brothers Joe and Guy Rice who had owned it, Guy having been manager of the first football team way back in 1900. The next year the district built new grandstands to accommodate the growing audiences, though volunteers continued to line the field to help keep down expenses."

With the rapid growth of both the school district and the city, the field saw less use, but the costs of maintenance continued to rise. It was a stand alone property, therefore the cost of maintaining it was higher than other PISD facilities located on school properties. With Plano's boost in population and residences nearby, parking and access for the numerous Plano students was nearly impossible.

Recognizing the city's interest in the land, PISD sold Rice Field to the city in January 2005 for housing to support the downtown area. Seven developers competed for the project - the city was pleased to award the contract to Lexington Luxury Builders, LLC, a company known for its quality and attention to detail. In the development of the site, Lexington Luxury Builders is doing an outstanding job of working with the community to preserve the feel

of the neighborhood. Special plans are underway to commemorate the history of the site. The target for completion of this development is three years, with the first homes available at the end of 2006.

Project Rendering



According to Frank Turner, Executive Director for the City of Plano, the city's goal is to add 1,000 dwellings within one-quarter mile of downtown Plano. This project of approximately 100 townhouses, combined with the 500 rental units in Eastside Village and the nearly 100 residences in development by 15th Street Village puts the count at 700 new homes. The 15th Street Village development has 31 units complete and 11 of them sold, with a target completion date of 2007. "What's going on in Historic Downtown Plano is catching the eye of urban center developers; and we can see another 300 units in the future to further the evolution of downtown," commented Turner.

Cox Building Opening in January

The Cox Building, located on Avenue H, is a cooperative renovation project including Plano Independent School District and the City of Plano. The planning of the reconstruction began three years ago. Construction began in March of 2005 and will reach completion at the end of January, under the direction of architects Good Fulton and Ferrell. The Cox Building has unique historical significance as it is the oldest existing public building in Plano. From the 1920s to the 1940s it served as the central school for the city, housing grades K through 12. The building was named after E.J. "Shorty" Cox, the beloved trainer and janitor of the school in the early 1920s.

The Cox Building has three floors. Once renovated, the lower level will house the City of Plano Creative Arts Programs with a 100-seat rehearsal/performance space in the original Cox gym. There will also be art classrooms and work rooms supporting The Courtyard Theater, in addition to a breezeway and lounge area connecting both buildings. The upper two floors will be used for various PISD programs, including deaf education, human resource functions and training for the district, with some PISD offices on the second floor and meeting rooms for faculty and staff on the top floor. There are already several tenants for rehearsal space. The 2006 City of Plano Summer Art Workshops will take place in the new building.

Happenings

January/February 2006

- Jan 1 - 20 Exhibit by Cheryl Cox, Painter
972-941-7740
Courtyard Theater
- Jan 1 - 21 The Hsinchu Taiwan Artists Exhibition
972-423-7809
ArtCentre of Plano
- Jan 6 - Feb 1 Exhibit by Joe Comito, Photographer
972-941-7740
Plano Municipal Center
- Jan 8 Woodwind Whirlwind, 972-473-7262
Plano Symphony Orchestra
Family Symphony Series
Courtyard Theater
- Jan 13 - 21 Beauty and the Beast, 972-769-0017
Plano Metropolitan Ballet
Courtyard Theater
- Jan 14 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Parade,
Program, Health Fair and Luncheon
972-941-7250
various locations
- Jan 15 MLK All Community Choir
972-422-0012
First United Methodist Church
- Jan 16 MLK Power Leadership Breakfast and
Teen Extravaganza
972-422-0012
CCCC Spring Creek Campus
- Jan 19 MLK PISD Program
972-422-0012
Plano Centre
- Jan 23 - Feb 28 Exhibit by Anne Womack & Dee Cvetko
972-941-7740
Courtyard Theater
- Jan 27 - Feb 28 Exhibit by Ann Cushing Gantz
972-423-7809
ArtCentre of Plano
- Jan 29 Percussion Hits, 972-473-7262
Plano Symphony Orchestra
Family Symphony Series
Courtyard Theater
- Jan 29 Very Special Arts Festival
972-941-7250
City of Plano Parks and Recreation Dept.
Plano Centre
- Feb 3 - 4 Story Book Children's Theatre
972-516-1653
Courtyard Theater
- Feb 4 Daddy's Little Sweetheart Dance
972-941-7250
City of Plano Parks and Recreation Dept.
Plano Centre
- Feb 9 - 18 Les Miserables, 972-422-2575
Plano Children's Theatre
Courtyard Theater
- Feb 19 It's a String Thing, 972-473-7262
Plano Symphony Orchestra
Family Symphony Series
Courtyard Theater

continued from cover

Richard Matkin, Associate Superintendent for Business Services, and Karla Oliver, Executive Director for Government and Community Relations, reported that a showcase of the three-floor brick structure will be a historic classroom located near the main entry in the former office of the superintendent of schools.

All air conditioning, heating and plumbing systems for the building have been updated. The windows have been replaced with energy efficient ones reminiscent of the actual historic period. The \$4 million project was funded through revenues from Tax Increment Finance District 2. The Cox Building and Courtyard Theater will now be eligible for state designation as a heritage resource.

As it continues to look toward further enhancement of Historic Downtown Plano, the City of Plano recently commissioned Gibbs Planning Group, Inc. The company studied the



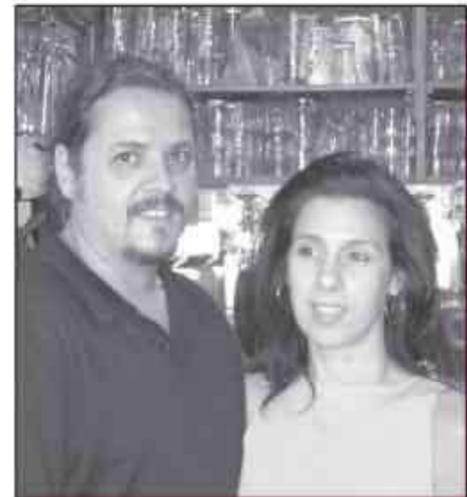
area, met with local businesses and officials, and provided a report with observations and recommendations. In studying the business mix, Gibbs Planning Group recommended additional restaurants, groceries and neighborhood services.

The city's plans for the future of the downtown area combine preservation and efforts to create an overall desirable experience.

Village People

Jorg Fercher had faith in his vision of Historic Downtown Plano five years ago when he purchased and renovated the building now housing his restaurant, Jorg's Café Vienna. It was the first full-service restaurant in the rebirth of downtown. In addition to authentic Austrian cuisine, patrons can enjoy a wonderful selection of German beers in the indoor/outdoor biergarten.

Jorg moved to the United States 18 years ago from his birthplace of Carinthia in southern Austria. He has lived in Plano for nine years with his wife Cathy and sons Derek and Matthew. Jorg's mother, who passed away in 1988, taught the culinary arts in Austria. Her skills were certainly passed on to her son as the food at Jorg's Café Vienna is both authentic and delectable. His father, a 30-year veteran of the Austrian government, continues to live in Carinthia and visits regularly.



Jorg provides the perfect combination of quality food and comfortable atmosphere in the restaurant. He and Cathy are there nearly all day from Tuesday to Saturday. Jorg shows his pride in his heritage by displaying photos of Austrians and informational pages on the windows and walls. However, it is far better to hear the stories from Jorg himself! Jorg truly enjoys life and treats his customers as his friends, often creating long-lasting friendships by making them feel at home.

Jorg's gusto for life, quality food and charismatic personality have earned him a reputation in many local publications. The restaurant has been featured in "D Magazine," "Plano Profile," "Texas Monthly," "The Dallas Morning News Guide" and "The Senior Voice." Awards received are as numerous as the publications. His most treasured are the Preservation of Excellence Award from the Heritage Commission and The Food Safety Excellence Award from the Plano Health Department for this year and last year.



Historic Views

Jeff and Jane Garrison also believe in a long-range future for Historic Downtown Plano. They purchased the Wall-Robbins House at 1813 Avenue K last September, with their sons Dan and David, and the Garrison Gardens Nursery property next door that the family had been leasing since 1979.



The Wall-Robbins House was built in 1898 by James Edgar Wall, who had married Florrie Bowman four years earlier. The home was considered the finest single-story residence in Plano at that time. It is a classic example of Queen Anne architecture and boasts five coal-burning fireplaces with hand-carved mantels, stained glass windows, 11 foot ceilings and beautiful heavy woodworking details.

The Walls sold the house and moved to Florida, where they had met, in 1907. The home was owned for a short time by J.L. Jellison. Purchased by cattle buyer W. Jeff Robbins in 1908, it became his family home for approximately 50 years. Robbins married three times; and it is said one of his wives died from burns sustained when her clothing caught fire from a stray ember. The fireplaces were screened and never used again. Another of his wives was struck and killed by an Interurban Railway car.



The house was later purchased by Joe Henry Huston and his wife Kathleen, who lived there with their daughters Kathy and Marlena. Huston was a pastor of the Plano Missionary Baptist Church on Avenue P. Perhaps because of the Robbins family tragedies or because the Huston family hosted a scary Halloween party for the church children, apparitions began to appear to members of the Huston family. One rainy afternoon when Marlena was playing on the back porch, she observed an unearthly visitor coming down the stairs from the unfinished attic. When she screamed the figure disappeared. Investigation revealed no one in the attic – only wet footprints on the steps. Kathleen Huston also saw a transparent visitor in her kitchen.

Max and Sidna Leavenworth purchased the property from the Huston family in 1966 and commenced the major undertaking of refurbishing it while keeping its historic charm. The heating, air conditioning and plumbing were updated. Upon its completion in April 1971, Sidna turned the house and the adjoining property into This Ole Nursery. In 1979 the nursery was leased to Garrison Gardens, and the house has been leased over the years to various tenants selling antiques, crafts and clothing.

The property changed hands again in 1984 when it was sold to Salyers-Cate Properties that again restored it with all new wiring, heating and air conditioning while maintaining the woodwork and the mantels. The attic space was finished into a ballroom and the back porch was enclosed in glass as a sun room. The wrap around porch was refurbished and a gazebo added to the back yard. This building has been used for the past 10 to 15 years mainly as a banquet and reception facility.

The Garrisons intend to continue to rent the facility for weddings, receptions and private parties, and Teresa Garrison, David's wife, is an event planner. The Garrisons look forward to a long future on the property.

Street Talk

Trading Spaces

Ida Breiten has moved her imprinting business from Simple Country Pleasures to her own shop across the street next to Candy Bouquet. The new name is **Creative Imprints**; and she's carrying high quality merchandise, including announcements, note cards, stationery gifts and collectibles such as Copenhagen plates. **Red Awning Antiques and Collectibles** has moved down the street to the #806. Ketty Jasper and Patty McKenzie, owners of **Ambiance Décor**, are excited to now have prime 15th Street frontage as they have moved into the space formerly occupied by Sherwood House. Their new place combines both Ambiance Décor and Ambiance Gifts under the one name. **Kay Askew Photography** has moved across the street to share space with **Old Towne Gallery and Frame**. Kay has been sharing customers with Lyndon Cotter, owner of the gallery, for years and both are pleased to have the reciprocal relationship of sharing space. Dan and Barb Cole, owners of **Candy Bouquet**, will be relocating across the street to #1035 in mid-January and are thrilled to have more than twice the space. **What's The Big Idea?** and **What's The Big Occasion?** have moved from 920 18th Street to the historic landmark Olney Davis House at 901 18th Street. Owned by Tracy Cink, the companies have a variety of corporate accounts and offer everything from ideas, logos, packaging and ad campaigns to client gift baskets. It has been exciting to see Denise and Sheldon Tauben along with Peggy Kleiner on 15th Street since November 1. Their store, **Just Gotta Have It**, signed a temporary lease for the space formerly occupied by Blue Goose for three months and will return to their year round space at Interiors Galleria on February 1.

The restored property at 1022 15th Street has been leased, according to Jack Boggs of **Eastside Partners**. The two-story restaurant space with an upper level terrace will house **Dish Neighborhood Cuisine**, a casual gourmet restaurant serving new American bistro style cuisine, with a variety of fresh seafood entrees and unique menu items. Dish will have a full mixed beverage permit. Partners owning the restaurant are Blake Liles and Rick Hemsath. Blake will also be the chef. The anticipated opening of the restaurant is March 1, 2006.

With the end of 2005, we bid a fond farewell to Luis Vasquez, the loyal and hardworking downtown caretaker who retired after working for the city for nearly 25 years. He will surely be missed.

Shopping the Village

Valentine's Day is coming up! Stop by **Candy Bouquet** to get your special someone a unique candy arrangement. Every bouquet is created by hand, designed just for you. Pick one from a selection of the more popular bouquets or have one custom designed.



If it's a fresh flower arrangement you'd like custom made for your sweetheart, just head down the street and stop at **Natural Elegance!**



Simple Country Pleasures is now carrying Tyler candles. They are handmade in Tyler with unique animal print packaging in a variety of sizes and scents.

City Scene



Parking on 16th Street has been revised to provide Resident Parking space. This has successfully moved many of the DART riders to the available lots at 14th Street and Avenue J, and 14th Street and Avenue K.

Renovation of 15th Street from Avenue G east to the rail tracks is anticipated to begin in April. The construction timetable is estimating completion by Thanksgiving, barring no weather challenges or unforeseen circumstances.

The Downtown Task Force, appointed by the Plano City Council should commence work in January. The anticipated outcomes may include: a vision for downtown development and financial tools to support the vision, along with other futuristic ideas for the area.

The Lexington Home Builders project on the Rice Field property should commence in the next few months. It is anticipated that residences will be ready for move-in within a year.

Douglass Community Center

Douglass Community Center will be quite busy in January and February, preparing for the Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration and Black History Month. On Saturday, January 14, the parade from Parker Road to 15th Street along Avenue K begins at 10 a.m. The City Hall Program along with the Health Fair will begin at 11 a.m. The center will host a luncheon on at 12 p.m. as part of the Martin Luther King, Jr. activities. During the week there will be art contests sponsored by the schools and judged at the center plus a variety of other events. All events are free and open to the public. For more information, go to www.planomlk.org or contact Earl Simpkins at 972-422-0012 ext 128.

February is Black History Month and on the last Saturday, February 25, Douglass Community Center will have a program from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. with a variety of entertainment including a dance group, a short show, sports contests and refreshments.



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The City of Plano provides the Village News to members of our community to keep citizens informed about the activities in the heart of Historic Downtown Plano.

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