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Downtown has lot to offer besides a short commute

Monday, October 9, 2000

George Myers Jr.

Dispatch Staff Reporter

Everyone expects Miranova residents to live swanky Downtown lives, but others in the business district live just as richly.

These urbanites know firsthand Columbus' undiscovered treasures: its topiaries and bike paths, its free library videos and prescription delivery, its cheap parking and markets of fresh produce.

Clueless suburbanites -- and many of the 122,000 commuters who live part time in the city's workplace canyons -- might wonder: How does the brick-and-pavement set get its needs met?

Easily, and often from just around the corner, Angela L. Bosworth said.

"I can park my car on a Friday after work and not need it again until Monday morning," she said. "That's how accessible everything is. And the best restaurants are right outside my door."

Bosworth, director of member and professional services at the Ohio State Bar Association, has lived comfortably since 1995 in one of the Battleship Building's 26 condos at 444 N. Front St. The gray structure's bolted-steel exterior



Eric Albrecht / Dispatch

Brian Higgins relaxes with his guitar in his apartment above Barley's Brewing. He has easy access to Downtown restaurants, nightspots and Blue Jackets hockey games. Walls of his apartment still have ads painted on them from their days as exterior walls.

Downtown has lot to offer besides a short commute gives it the look of a battleship.

Like many other residents in the central city -- bounded by I-670, I-71, I- 70 and the Scioto River -- Bosworth knows how to make Downtown entertain, cook and work for her.

She buys fresh produce at the North Market, 20 steps from her home; gets her car serviced at Victorian Village's BP Oil, at Neil and Poplar avenues; and has her dry-cleaning delivered through Columbus Lace Cleaning. United Parcel Service delivers to her building's lobby; the newspaper carrier, to her front door.

"It would be nice to have a corner drugstore, but we do have City Center, which has some of the best shopping in town," she said.

More than 3,380 people live in the business district, according to a study released in January by the Danter Co., an E. Town Street company that specializes in real-estate research.

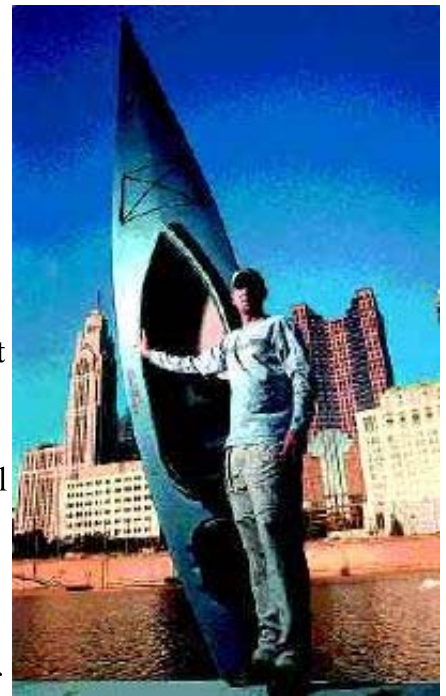
Burnished with the patina of worn bricks and neon, the area includes Waterford Tower Condominiums, at 155 W. Main St.; a half-dozen apartment buildings, several by the Old Deaf School Park at E. Town Street and Washington Avenue; rehabbed upper-floor units scattered like afterthoughts above storefronts; and Miranova, at 1 Miranova Place, where two of the 113 units are occupied and 75 percent are sold.

Since 1997, central-city neighborhoods have been zoned residential as well as commercial to spur housing development.

At first glance, the patchwork mixed-use result makes the central city look like one of Columbus' least- cohesive communities. Yet those who live within its borders speak of a camaraderie, a connectedness and energy that they didn't feel in the suburbs.

Many meet around town for dinner, lattes or night life. Others share affinities for urban culture and redevelopment. Several know the square footage of each others' lofts, apartments and condos.

"I can meet more of my daily needs Downtown now than anywhere else in the city," said Michael A. Wilkos.



Jeff Adkins / For The Dispatch

Michael A. Wilkos stands along the Scioto River with his kayak. On-the-water recreation is just a short walk from his E. Gay Street residence.

The E. Gay Street resident is a project manager for the Capitol South Community Urban Development Corp., a private nonprofit that frequently partners with the city and private developers on Downtown projects.

For fresh produce, Wilkos walks to N. Pearl Street's seasonal farmers market or hops the Central Ohio Transit Authority's 25-cent High Street Link to the North Market.

He handles his hardware needs at Zettler, 101 E. Main St., next to Ray's Fish Market. For recreation, he slings his kayak over his shoulder, strolls two blocks and slips into the Scioto River.

His breakfast, lunch and dinner picks are Jack's on Lynn Street, Pepper's on S. High and the Elevator Brewing Co. on N. High. Other dining options are abundant: 93 restaurants serve in the business district.

City Center, Wilkos said, still offers "the cheapest parking in town."

"We're still missing a movie theater, but we'll all be able to walk to the movies next summer" when the Arena District multiplex opens in July, he pointed out.

Having a taste for the Downtown's "vertical communities," empty-nesters Jerry and Tona Converse will complete their move from Waterford to Miranova in the spring.

"We're just in love with the life," said Mr. Converse. "You can walk to the restaurants, buy groceries at the Big Bear and take in the festivals. It's just easy."

Downtown traffic evaporates at 6 p.m., he said. "By then, it's all on Sawmill, Rt. 161 and the Outerbelt."

Doug Zullo lives a five-block walk from his job as the Columbus Symphony Orchestra's grants writer.

"It's seven minutes after 5 (p.m.), and I'm home already, watching the traffic head out of town," he said. "Every day I thank God that I'm not doing that, especially with all the construction."

Zullo rents an apartment at Grant-Oaks, which fronts Oak Street between Grant Avenue and S. 9th Street. He doesn't own a car; when he needs groceries, he rides a COTA bus to the Big Bear in German Village or Victorian Village.

That "small inconvenience," he said, is offset by his proximity to the Columbus Metropolitan Library's free movies, books and CDs, at 96 S. Grant Ave., and to Town Addiction, an E. Town Street coffee shop that serves up Internet access till midnight.

From an apartment two floors above Barley's Brewing, at 467 N. High, Brian

Higgins need only take the stairs to a favorite pub.

He lives a puck's throw from Nationwide Arena and will walk to each of the Blue Jackets' home games. He has his pick of a dozen restaurants within a block. He bicycles at nearby Goodale Park and sometimes to his North Side job with the Greater Linden Development Corp.

"I'm here for the foreseeable future," Higgins said.

He has exactly what he wants -- or very nearly. "The only other thing that might interest me is ownership -- Downtown, of course -- but it would have to be something more affordable than Miranova."

Point taken by Mayor Michael B. Coleman, whose administration wants housing for 10,000 central-city residents.

"The Downtown market easily will bear 500 new units a year," he said.

"Miranova and the Arena District will be catalysts. Where people move, retail and business will follow.

"Ideally, of course, we'd like those to happen simultaneously."

The sooner the better, said Wilkos. "The only thing we're missing Downtown are more neighbors."

The Arena District's 300-plus units will open by 2002, but their prices might not fit the income of many of the 15,000 college students who commute to the Innerbelt's four colleges.

Jim Schimmer of the city's Development Office expects the Arena District to "emerge on its own, but we're hoping now for one developer to stick his toe in the market in other locations and be a fertilizer" for more housing.

More units, Coleman said, would "lead to a richer Downtown experience."

"The Downtown is not for everyone, but it is an experience, and part of that experience is living there and feeling connected to everything."

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