

A section prepared by the staff of the Midlands Business Journal

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Omaha's Districts

Rise of 'new' developments in metro harken back to community spirit of bygone

by Michelle Leach

Sometimes, one has to look back to move forward. And the establishment and evolution of "districts" within Omaha, at least partly, reflects a return to the neighborhoods of yesteryear — where everything was within walkable "reach."

"The live, work, play trend reflects our society's desire for closer communities and more face-to-face interactions," said Boyd Jones, Construction Business Development and Community Engagement Manager at Bridget Bumgardner. "The possibility of walking or biking to work helps our environment and improves personal health. In business, this promotes networking and the opportunity to learn from others."

She continued, describing the environment as ripe for building relationships and investments in a "shared community."

"We're seeing it in all of these exciting neighborhoods in Omaha: Blackstone District, Benson and now the Rail & Commerce District," Bumgardner said. "They're not so much new, as a revival of the spirit of Omaha when it was founded."

Boyd Jones' very "home base" is representative of these types of "exciting neighborhoods": the historic Rail & Commerce District in the Old Market.

"When [President] Jon Crane set out to restore the Burlington Mail Terminal into the Rail and Commerce Building, it was part of a bigger vision in Omaha to give people the opportunity to live in denser communities where jobs and social venues — gyms, shops, restaurants and bars — are within walking distance," Bumgardner said of the space along South 10th Street. "He wanted to provide our employees and tenants with a place that improves their quality of life, helping them be their most productive, fulfilled selves."

Boyd Jones is joined by Warren Distribution, Bluestem Energy Solutions and Commerce Village, which reportedly moved into the building last year.

"There's increased engagement between colleagues and projects within our own office, but also stronger connections with other organizations in the building," Bumgardner said, referring to hosting myriad networking and community events — including the Greater Omaha Chamber's Leadership Institute — and its offering tours of the building.

Principal and LEED Accredited Professional Jeffrey J. Dolezal and his team at TACKarchitects recently moved its offices into another neighborhood—transforming



Arun Agarwal, CEO and founder of White Lotus Group.

development: Benson's BIN 61. Dolezal addressed, in part, how these types of spaces are increasing daytime foot traffic in the area.

"We bring 12 staff, along with two additional tenants who have approximately 15 staff between them; that's almost 30 people

who will be looking for places to eat over lunch," he said. "There are three to four other developments we're working on in Benson that should be announced shortly. Each of these projects promise to have a daytime office, retail component."



Dolezal

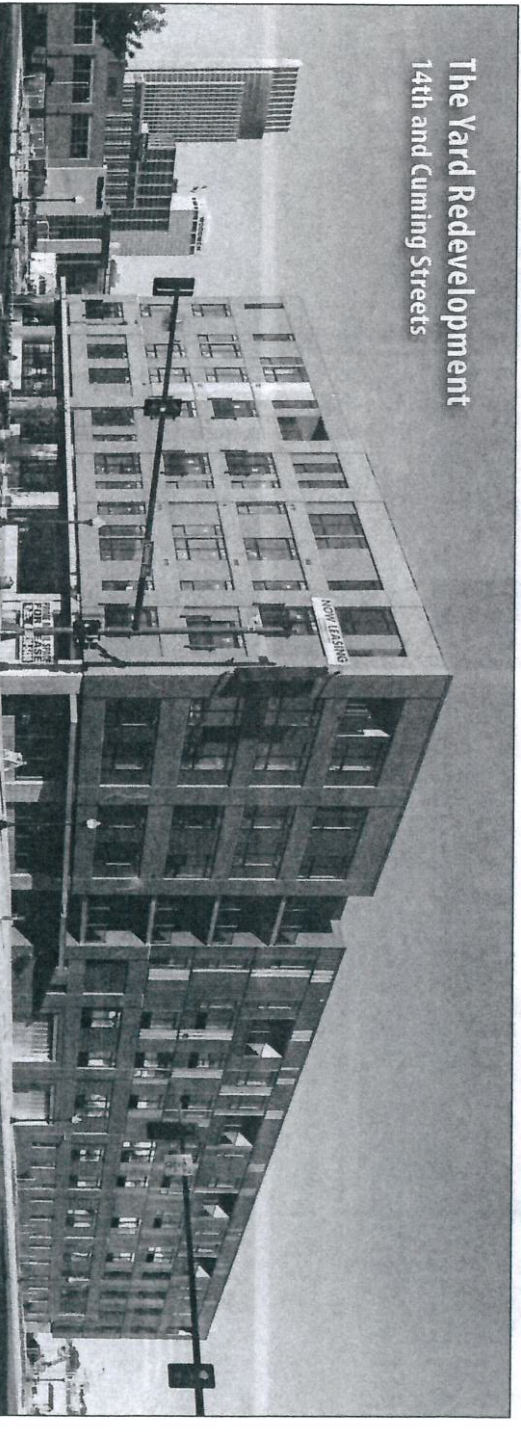
space that we plan to engage artists for Benson First Fridays."

Dolezal indicated the parking lot it owns to the south might play host to outdoor events, too.

"We found Benson to be an affordable place to relocate our offices, with many amenities nearby for our staff," he said. "A number of our employees live nearby and are very excited for the move."

TACKarchitects also has partnered with

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Rise of 'new' developments in metro

Continued from preceding page.

Watson Cos., real estate development and consulting. Recently, Adam Watson highlighted its work in the historic "Little Bohemia" neighborhood on what was described as one of the first housing development projects of its kind in the unique community.

"I think that it's a great alternative option to living in a high-rise building," Watson said. "It's more of a walkable neighborhood feel, that's just adjacent to the Old Market. You can't find that if you go to the north or the south."

Watson further noted they're not "trying to recreate something else."

"We're trying to revive what was already there," he said. "Neighborhoods go in cycles. We feel like things are back up again."

The many properties they own in the neighborhood, Watson indicated, appeal to a wide range of buyers — from the smaller, quaint two-bed units to larger two-story properties and even some duplexes.

Charm seemingly abounds; he describes hardwood floors, grand ceilings and wood staircases.

"It's not row after row of that uniform house-type in that area," Watson said.

In mid-March, Noddle Co. President and CEO Jay Noddle spoke to the transformative impact of Kiewit's new headquarters on North Downtown. At the time of this writing, the headquarters to be located across from the Kiewit University training center was slated to span at least 165,000 square feet, with construction-related costs of up to \$76 million and a reported completion date of 2020.

"I think there is no doubt that Kiewit's decision to commit their workforce to this location and to the NoDo area is going to

have an effect of really moving the needle in that part of the city," Noddle said, emphasizing more planned development in the immediate area.

He anticipates Creighton's growth to the east may be "accelerated," and referenced related amenities with more land available in the neighborhood for further redevelopment.

"We've done this a number of times in the eastern half of the city ... and we're able to see to it that other sites are available for redevelopment," he said, adding that this may be done "with relative ease" due to how the projects are organized — making it easy for other developers to come in, acquire the site and "off they go."

And, he adds, things like Tax Increment Financing are available within the redevelopment district.

White Lotus Group Founder and CEO Arun Agarwal put a spotlight on the latest with the firm's work on HUB 1401 at 14th and Jones streets.



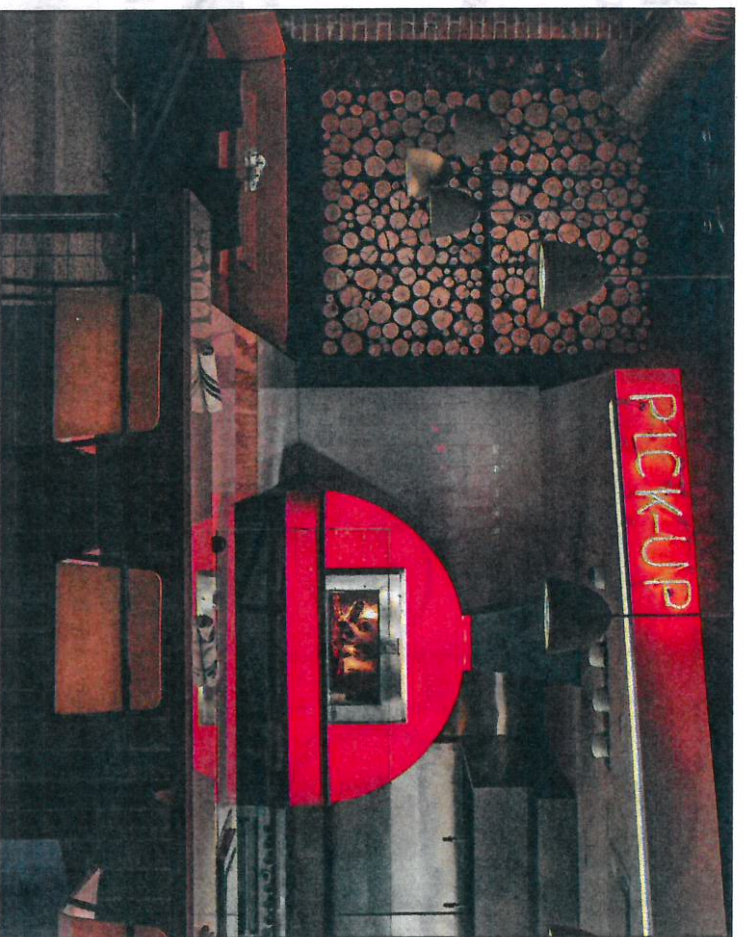
"Tentatively, the renovation of this building would include what we are calling an 'innovation hub' with an out-of-the-box office space, a coffee shop/beatery, a

brewery and even a rooftop deck space," he said in early March. "The team sees this as being a place where creativity can flourish for both a new tenant and for the general public."

They anticipate starting construction on the building's shell in April. Also in April, the firm is hosting a grand opening ribbon-cutting ceremony for another "community within a community": 30 Metro Apartments at 5319 N. 30th St.

At the time of this writing, the space was being pre-leased and slated for completion by April 1.

"This \$20 million development on the



Dante Pizzeria Napoletana in Blackstone District. (Photo courtesy of TACKarchitects)

former site of a beloved Omaha eatery, Mister C's, will serve the Metropolitan Community College Fort Omaha campus," he said.

The 113,000-square-foot mixed-use development features 110 affordable apartment units, a Charles Drew health clinic, T-Mobile location, and 3,000 square feet of commercial space, according to Agarwal.

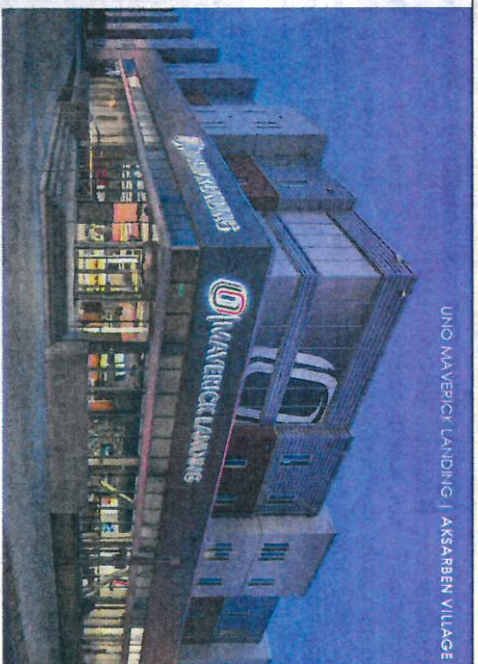
"The design and aesthetic is consistent with the college," he said. "The rectangle box structure pops with the prominent exterior rainfall system panels that have been installed."

"The multi-colored fiber cement panels are a forward-thinking product and are meant to be a very complementary look to what the college is doing."

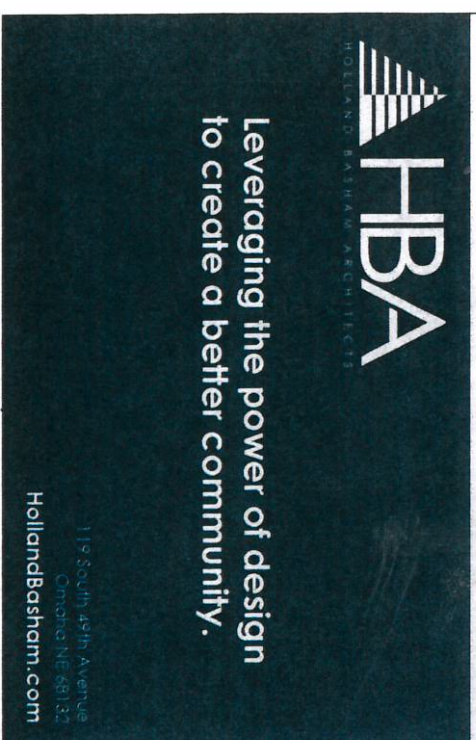
Bumgardner indicated Boyd Jones is watching the Rail & Commerce District's



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The Rail and Commerce Building at 10th and Mason streets. (Photo courtesy of JE Dunn)

"It's something that most architects were taught in school, and it's refreshing to finally see these developments occurring within our community," he said.

Watson said restoring the beauty of homes his firm has acquired in Little Bohemia has had an immediate impact, as the entire neighborhood appears to have a renewed sense of pride shown by the investment in their properties, from fresh paint to landscaping.

"The neighborhood is feeling that someone cares again," he said.