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New buildings brighten Triangle area

By Jay M. Grossman – STAFF WRITER

A beacon of light has spread to the Triangle District, thanks to the new AAA building and the 735 Forest building.

The two buildings stand next to each other on Forest Street, along the northern edge of the district. They're pioneering developments in a sense, with a mission to attract new energy and business into the district.

Architect Victor Saroki, designer of the 735 Forest building, believes it will happen.

"The one nice thing about 735 Forest is it truly is a mixed-use building," Saroki said. "The restaurant will go on the first floor, offices are on the second and residential on the third floor. It's exactly that kind of usage envisioned for the Triangle District."

Bert Koseck with Neumann/Smith Architecture designed the AAA building at the corner of Forest and Woodward Avenue. It's the first LEED-certified building in Birmingham and Koseck also hopes it will set a standard for the area.

"I think we've set the bar for some quality projects," Koseck said Tuesday. "I like the fact the property owners are talking to one another in the district. I like the fact the residents are weighing in and are open-minded....and I like the fact the city is involved. I think they need to be at the table as well."

MORE PARKS

Bordered by Maple, Woodward and Adams, the district is characterized by single-family homes to the north and stand-alone buildings to the south that are surrounded in a virtual sea of surface parking lots.

Gil Goode has lived in Birmingham for 59 years on Chestnut, one of three residential sidestreets inside the Triangle.

He welcomes the new activity.

"After 6 p.m. that north area is dead," Goode said.

A master plan created for the Triangle District aims to eventually replace the surface lots with pocket parks and a variety of new developments, both large and small, that can incorporate multiple uses.

In the meantime, things are happening already"

Chef Brian Polcyn, proprietor of the award-winning Five Lakes Grill in Milford, was awarded a bistro liquor license by the Birmingham City Commission to open The Forest Avenue Bistro on the first floor of the 735 Forest Building.

Mosher Dolan Cataldo & Kelly, the Birmingham firm that developed the 735 Forest building, is located immediately next door on Forest Street and will likely play an integral role in attracting other quality projects to the Traingle.

Slightly to the north along Maple and Elm, developer Ronald L. Hughes plans to develop an upscale housing project for independent senior living called The Regency at Elm. The four-story complex replaces the Wm. R. Hamilton Funeral Home.

Toward the south, talks are under way to expand Papa Joe's Gourmet Market on Woodward Avenue. The Birmingham market also received a bistro liquor license that will allow it to start serving wine by the glass.

Still unknown is when the Mayfair project at Bowers Street and Elm will begin. Developers purchased Baker's Square at 825 Bowers Street with the idea of demolishing the restaurant and replacing it with a mixed-use development that would occupy almost the entire block of Bowers.

"It's still on the board," said Koseck, project architect for the Mairfair. "It's still in the development stages - I'm optimistic."

STAR POWER

The initial attraction to the Triangle district will likely be Polcyn himself, a virtual celebrity in the culinary world.

Five Lakes Grill was named Michigan's Restaurant of the Year in 2005 and 2006. Polcyn authored his own cookbook and was a finalist in 2006 for the prestigious "best chef in the Midwest" award.

"People will go to his restaurant because they know his name and his reputation," Saroki said. "He's the top chef in Michigan and one of the best in the country."

Erica Keller will be one of his first customers when the Forest Avenue Bistro opens in the spring.

"I can't tell you how excited I am to have a 'rock star chef' in my neighborhood," said Keller, a young attorney who lives on Forest Street.

Concerns about cut-through traffic and parking were addressed at the City Commission meeting. Two-hour street parking is being added along some of the streets to accommodate customers, while Saroki said several shared parking agreements are in place between 735 forest building and neighboring businesses.

"I think the challenge is going to be, as new developments set in, to work on shared parking and common parking," Saroki said. "There's a lot of parking available if we can share uses, but ultimately the city will need to build a structure."

Kevin Reid moved onto Chestnut Street in May. One reason he decided to locate his family in the Triangle District was because he saw the area has room to grow.

"I'm excited about the restaurant," said Reid. "Honestly, this type of development is exactly the reason why we decided to move here."