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Downtown delight

Despite glut of building foreclosures, empty space, more eateries and shops sprout up in East Fourth area

By **STAN BULLARD**

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Jim Holcepel can't wait for spring, and not just because he can feel the winter's cold radiate from customers at Crepes De Luxe, a stand he opened two months ago in the food court of the landmark Arcade in downtown Cleveland.

"We know January is the worst time to start a restaurant. This is when restaurant owners take long vacations," Mr. Holcepel said of the venture he started with his brother, Bob, who has run a crepe stand at the West Side Market for five years. "This is a good time to build the business because we figure we can work out the kinks by spring, when people don't have to put on a coat to go outside."

Mr. Holcepel is looking to build something for himself after a layoff ended a 20-year career in corporate-level book sales. So far, sales are on plan. Moreover, he feels good vibes in the part of downtown where he's chosen to locate.

"I think there is a lot happening quietly down here," Mr. Holcepel said. "There is a certain attraction to the area around East Fourth Street."

Despite a spate of building foreclosures downtown, a handful of new food and retail ventures have taken root along Euclid and Prospect avenues between East Ninth Street and Public Square. While downtown historically churns such ventures, the startups are outnumbering the shutdowns and are spreading beyond the East Fourth entertainment district.

"You are starting to see the new Euclid Avenue emerge," Tom Yablonsky, executive vice president of the Downtown Cleveland Alliance, said.

Part of the revival stems from completion last year of the \$200 million HealthLine, which spruced up the streetscape from Public Square to University Circle along with introducing hybrid bus-rail service.

East Fourth also gained momentum last year with several restaurant openings despite the sour economy. And more appear on the way.

Developer K&D Group is proceeding with a \$60 million conversion of the long-dormant Atrium Office Plaza to apartments, office and retail space. On the Prospect Avenue side of the Atrium complex, the Caddyshack Lounge, a sports bar featuring electronic golf simulators, is going in, as is Titans, a gym, tanning center and café. And on the

Euclid Avenue side, Wyse Advertising recently moved its offices into the building's first floor.



Young blood moves in

Some real estate insiders privately worry a large office in first-floor space might dilute retail synergy from the street. However, developer Ari Maron, whose MRN Ltd. owns competing properties on East Fourth, sees Wyse as a plus. He even quips that the ad agency's presence is the start of the "Madmen District" downtown, a reference to the popular cable TV drama about Madison Avenue's golden years.

"The other big piece of this is that young technology and marketing companies and people who work for them are starting to see this part of downtown as a place to live and hang out," Mr. Maron said.

For example, MRN landed digital marketing agency Rosetta Corp. as a tenant for its old National City Bank Building, 629 Euclid. Rosetta will move about 400 employees downtown this spring from Beachwood.

Mr. Maron recalls that when Terry Coyne, Rosetta's broker, originally called MRN, "he asked, 'How can I get as close to East Fourth Street as possible?' Now, he's not the only one calling. People now see the vision of East Fourth that we had as a reality. A new buzz is being created. The number of calls I get (about space) is really different than a year ago."

That buzz is starting to spread beyond the stretch of vaudeville-era buildings on East Fourth. In the food court at Colonial Marketplace, Hungarian Kitchen — which boasts it is 100% Magyar — opened in December offering ethnic staples such as stuffed cabbage as lunch fare.

One of the most talked-about restaurants to open downtown is Chocolate Bar, which offers chocolate-themed entrées and desserts in the former Vivo restaurant space on the Euclid Avenue side of the Arcade. In the other corner of the Arcade's Euclid side, Presto Sandwich provides a downtown location for the purveyor of fresh soups and salads in Fairview Park.

Five other food or retail shops opened this winter in the Arcade. And another tenant, Designer Suits, relocating from 1110 Euclid, will open this month on the Arcade's Superior Avenue side.

Fresh eyes, fresh look

Sarah Hawkins, the Arcade's manager, said talks are under way with four more prospects for the nearly 120-year-old structure that houses a Hyatt Regency Hotel on its upper floors.

The Arcade is gaining leasing momentum even though it is the subject of a foreclosure action. The Leader Building, immediately east of the Arcade, also is in foreclosure but still landed a pizza shop called "Guy's Pizza Co." within weeks after Domino's Pizza closed nearby.

Closer to Public Square, construction workers have begun outfitting the storefront of the old W.T. Grant Co. Building at 236 Euclid Ave. for Zoup!, a franchise selling salads, wraps and soups.

The owner of the new Zoup! is Paula Elliott, who took early retirement from valve maker Swagelok Co. in Solon to start her own business. She said she gravitated to Euclid because she wants to serve the daytime worker population and likes the way the redone street, with brick pavers, landscaping and sculptures, looks today.

Even though she is a lifetime Clevelander, she doubts she would have given the same shot to pre-Health Line Euclid.

Likewise, as a Cleveland native, Jim Holcepel said the idea of setting up shop at the Arcade enthralled him. However, he still did hourly body counts before committing to the landmark to ensure foot traffic was there.

"A lot of merchants here say it's not what it was a few years ago," Mr. Holcepel said.

"A lot of us remember a lot of things that used to be down here. But the 20- and 30-year-olds here don't remember any of that," he said. "All they know is there is a new bar here or a bowling alley there. We can't look at (downtown) for what it was, but what it will be."



Jim Holcepel, who worked in corporate-level book sales for 20 years before he was laid off, has high hopes for his new venture, Crepes De Luxe. The stand recently opened in the food court of the Arcade in Cleveland.

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