

# Condominium conversion continues in area

By MICHELLE CHRISTENBURY  
DTH Staff Writer

The trend toward condominium conversion in Chapel Hill and Carrboro continues, with several recent conversions, including Castilian Villa, Hillmont and Cedar Court Apartments.

Local real estate agents said they expected Graham Court and University Gardens to become condominiums in the near future.

Condominium conversion means that apartment property is purchased by an individual or a group of investors, who offer the units of the building for sale and private ownership, rather than for rent as apartments.

If someone is living in the building at the time of conversion from apartments to condominiums, his lease grants him the right to live there only until the lease's expiration.

He then may be offered the chance to buy his apartment, or may be asked to relocate.

Chapel Hill Town Planner Chris Berndt said, however, that there were local stipulations that protect the tenant for a period of time.

Tenants must be given a certain period of time before they are required to vacate their apartments or terminate their leases.

Tenants should also be given the exclusive right to purchase their apartments before they are sold to the general public.

"A 1980 HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) study found that condominium conversions were most likely to occur in growing communities with active housing markets," Berndt said.

"Chapel Hill fits into this profile." But, Berndt said, recent, dramatic increases in interest rates on loans may cause a slowdown in the number of conversions.

Debbie Kuilema, the recently-named general manager of The Oaks Apartments, said that high interest rates may have been the cause of The Oaks converting back to apartments.

The Oaks had been converted to condominiums but were changed back into apartments August 7.

None of the units had actually been purchased before the re-conversion to apartments, so there were no problems associated with displacing condominium owners, Kuilema said. The condominium conversion project never reached that stage.

Berndt said there were both advantages and disadvantages to condominium conversions.

"On the one hand, condominiums provide moderately priced housing, depending on the project. Also, parents can purchase a condominium for a student in school and get a tax write-off for that unit."

"However, condominium conversions could possibly cause problems if too many occur at one time," Berndt said. "Condominiums reduce the supply of rental housing in communities, and Chapel Hill historically has a low vacancy rate."

Tony Lathrop, town relations chairman for UNC's student government, said that condominium conversion would not be a benefit to students.

"Condominiums could be inconvenient for students because they (students) probably would not want to invest the time and money into such a big investment," Lathrop said.

"Chapel Hill is also a transitive environment and most students probably wouldn't want to be tied down to one place."

Dave Farrell, a student and two-year resident of University Gardens Apartments, is also displeased with the idea of condominium conversions.

University Gardens is believed to be in line for conversion in the near future.

"I think it is terribly unfair that the people of Chapel Hill have nothing to say about it," Farrell said. "This is a University community and students must have a place to stay. Most students cannot afford the obligation of owning a condominium."

"I just don't see how the town will gain from the conversions," Farrell said. "University Gardens is within walking distance to campus. The conversion will only force more students off campus, causing more problems with busing and traffic."

"I'm expecting to be out by Christmas. There's no choice for me but to move."



Send a greeting

## Use a message cake

By CHIP WILSON  
DTH Staff Writer

Greeting cards may be the very best way to show you care, according to one company's slogan, but in Chapel Hill, it isn't the very least.

Among the various ways of sending messages are balloon bouquets, singing telegrams, dancing clowns and even a belly dancer.

One Carrboro firm, Balloons and Tunes, specializes in balloon bouquets, singing telegrams and message cake delivery. Since the company began operating in November 1980, business has boomed, said co-owner Sharon Collins.

"Last year, we had quite a few students request our service," she said. "Many times someone will see somebody in class that they like, but never say anything to her. So he will call us and we'll go over to her dorm and sing a message like, 'I'd really like to get to know you better.'"

"Other things we have done have been 'Happy Birthday' messages, get-well greetings and congratulations messages. We even proposed marriage once."

In addition to balloon bouquets and singing messages, Balloons and Tunes also offers delivery of a message cake by a

Cookie Muncher dressed in a blue costume.

For those whose preferences extend beyond cookie monsters and balloons, a Raleigh woman will come to a party, office or hospital room and perform a Turkish belly dance in addition to "Happy Birthday" or "Get Well Soon."

"It's a lot like a singing telegram," said Faika Jamal, who was born in Turkey. "What I try to do is catch the man off guard while he is still at his office, in the hospital or party." After the performance is over, she said, Jamal then presents the customer with a card.

One primary drawback to purchasing this unusual greeting may be the price.

Jamal said a belly-dance greeting in Chapel Hill would usually cost \$50 or \$60, since she has to travel from Raleigh, where most of her student clientele is.

The price of a singing telegram could also run to \$200, since options such as originally-composed songs and late night visitations are offered.

"Many students usually request our lowest price, which is \$12," she said.

Other local firms that offer message delivery include Balloon's Forever in Cary and B and B Music Company in Chapel Hill.

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