

LOCAL

A 'Phoenix rising' in downtown KM

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Long before the textile mills closed, buildings on Battleground Avenue and Mountain Street possessed the heart of Kings Mountain's central business district. The stores, empty or full, have stood the tests of time, witnessing the glory days of company and the sad days of abandonment.

"They've been witness to a community and character. When you think about all the changes that have occurred, it's interesting," Dover said.

Then the textiles closed and the city's downtown fell into disrepair becoming historical remnants of KM's vibrant past.

The process of building character in a new light

In recent years there have been those, such as the Mountaineer Partnership, local architects, general contractors, and businessmen like John Harris, who seek to breathe new life into the ghostly buildings downtown.

"Personally I feel like it's been a wake-up call for people. We have to look inward a little bit more and strengthen what we have," stated Roger Holland of Holland and Hamrick Architects.

Holland helped create J. Oliver's coffee shop and Alliance bank on Battleground Avenue for Harris.

"When John (Harris) got it, he

fixed it up before Alliance took over (on the rest of the renovations). We tried to recapture the original character of the building, not try to modernize in terms of design, but be true to the original style of the building," Holland said.

The major positive in not tearing down an old building, Holland says, is "the final result is less expensive than starting from scratch." Also, materials from the original building can be reused to convey the structure's original personality.

"The architecture didn't follow the national transit. KM went with a particular architecture that other towns at the time weren't doing. It shows a tenacity of spirit," Dover said of the original buildings.

With these unique structures already in place, Holland stated, "You end up with a lot of things you couldn't build today."

"These are old buildings. We tried to salvage what was here," said John Harris, who owns J. Oliver's and has an office suite on the second floor of Alliance Bank.

One of the things upstairs in Harris's offices, which are currently empty, that he and Holland kept in place were the shop's original bathroom doors.

Perhaps the most noticeable feature in Harris's establishments are the open ceilings which Harris calls the "loft concept." In other words there isn't any tiling and the ceiling rafters are exposed.

"Rather than come back with a tile ceiling we thought this would be a way to recapture the building," Holland said.

Not everything stays the same...

On the contrary not every historic quality of the two buildings could be kept.

"They were both in bad shape. It's almost like the phoenix rising from the ashes when you see a structure like that (after it's renovation is complete)," Holland said.

Harris said that the wooden floor had caved in and below it was nothing but dirt.

"We had a situation where the floor was in very bad shape. We had to look at the most economical way to have that floor. The concrete made the most sense," Holland said.

Underneath, what Harris calls, the "etching and stained tile floor" of J. Oliver's and the carpet of Alliance Bank lies a sturdy bed of concrete. In his offices upstairs, Harris transformed the original floor boards into stained wood flooring.

Just a little make-up...

In regards to many of the buildings Dover said, "most of (the renovations are) just cosmetic."

Teri Deal, who is opening an interior design store on Mountain Street, in October, didn't face the floor problems Harris did.

"I'd like to restore it as best I

can. I'm not one who likes to take things down. We're going to try to restore it and make it look pretty," Deal said.

She plans to keep the wall intact, but to add lots of color. She also wants to have a chandelier in the lobby.

The back office will have styles and designs for commercial and residential clients to review.

"I feel like I can embrace one of those different styles and designs and take it where it needs to go," Deal said.

She does intend to replace the current-standing red door.

Back door garden

Both Deal and Harris planned to cultivate back door gardens behind their properties. Harris worked with Fred Blackley to landscape the rear of his building with greenery and white pebbles.

Deal has a much bigger business backyard. Some of her plants have grown taller than her. She hopes that she can create an attractive garden to go with her sense of design.

The problem with empty buildings...

Most of the other buildings that are empty downtown are owned by Kings Mountain Properties, according to Caroline Dover.

"It seems the trend is to let them sit there until the perspective business is made," Dover stated.

While there are still empty buildings downtown Harris said that the problem with it is that an owner has bought a building without a vision.

"We are not spectators, we are land developers," Harris said.

He claims that he put in the renovation money for his two businesses knowing one would be a coffee shop and hoping that the other would attract a bank.

"To often when a person purchases a building like that they don't have the vision. Johnny (Harris) did have the vision to see what it could be. It's rewarding when you take a space that would be considered almost worthless and bring it back to an attractive structure," Holland stated.

Dover admitted that the MP doesn't have a target business for recruitment, but "if I see a good fit for KM I check if they might like to open a second business in downtown."

Are there more businesses to come?

With transportation and shipping costs on the rise, Holland said that certain companies, which fled overseas, are now finding it more economical to come back to the United States.

"I'd like to think the trend is reversing itself somewhat. We may see jobs coming back to the U.S.," Holland said.

It may soon be that all structures on Battleground Avenue are "phoenixes rising from the ashes."

KM WEATHER REPORT

By Kenneth Kitzmiller

	August 25-31	Year Ago
Total precipitation	8.28	1.06
Maximum 1 day	5.51	0.59
Month to date	9.9	1.06
Year to date	34.97	23.65
Low temperature	69 (27-29th)	69 (3rd)
High temperature	88 (31st)	103 (9th, 10th)
Avg. temperature	78.8	85.2

On the record:

- * In August 2003, Kings Mountain had 12.2" of rainfall.
- * The wettest month on record was October 1990 when 13.28" of precipitation fell on Kings Mountain.
- * The driest month on record was October 2005 when only 0.08" of precipitation fell on Kings Mountain.
- * The wettest year on record was 1995 washing in with 69.84" of total precipitation.
- * The driest year on record was 1998 with 38.25" of total precipitation.

CORRECTION

In "City Council postpones LBTD referendum decision", which appeared in last week's Herald, the names of Rev. James Lochridge, Melanie Ballard and Lou Ballew were misspelled.

Keith Miller, a Sunday School teacher at First Baptist Church, who spoke out against a liquor by the drink referendum, was also misidentified as Keith Pettis. The Herald apologizes for any confusion these errors may have caused.



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