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DOWNTOWN ARLINGTON: Redevelopment efforts pay off in big way

Along Abram Street a courtyard with picnic tables beckons between Freebirds World Burrito and Twisted Root Burger Co. Next door the newly reimagined Hooligans presents a stylish and casual bar with beautiful woodgrain touches, a stone fireplace, and a cozy patio. A few steps around the corner you'll find old favorite J. Gilligans still serving cold beer and heaps of Irish nachos. Behind Gilligans the trendy Capital Bar has transformed an old Goodyear building.

Little of this was here a few years ago: the restaurants, the people, the cars parked along South Street because the nearby lots are full. Hard to believe. Downtown Arlington is bustling, and people are talking.

Architecture alumnus Homer Saenz takes his family downtown at least once a week. Its nice to have a place to go out with your friends, enjoy some live music and things that we haven't had before, he says. We've always had to go to Fort Worth or Dallas to do that. I really like what's going on down there.

MIDDLE OF SOMEWHERE

It's a comfort knowing we have a downtown that's growing and vibrant and will continue to grow and become a fun place for people.

South Arlington may be a hub for shoppers with The Parks at Arlington mall and Arlington Highlands, and north Arlington is a sports fans paradise with Rangers Ballpark, Cowboys Stadium, and abundant sports bars. But downtown has found its niche, too eclectic dining, entertainment, cultural events. Forget north and south. The place to be is right in the middle.

Downtown wasn't always a big deal. It was terrible, alumna Patti Diou, executive director of Friends of the Levitt Pavilion, recalls of her time as a UT Arlington student. It wasn't a downtown. There was nothing.

Efforts to improve the area began a couple of decades ago and gained steam in 2006. The result has been a burst of development and interest.

UT Arlington has fueled downtown's resurgence. President James D. Spaniolo sought for Arlington a college town atmosphere, so the University partnered with the city to establish the Downtown Arlington Management Corp. The two provided initial funding, then the city established a business improvement district to subsidize the support. The district taxes 400 properties within the downtown boundaries, approximately 15 cents per \$100 in valuation.

Around that time, the Levitt Pavilion was rising across from City Hall in a land swap with the First Baptist Church. The outdoor performance venue was a collaborative venture involving the Downtown Arlington Management Corp., city of Arlington, Chamber of Commerce, and the University.

UT Arlington's ambitious College Park District all by itself takes downtown to another level, adding numerous restaurants and the 7,000-seat College Park Center events venue. Diners can frequent Pie Five Pizza Co., Coolberry Frozen Yogurt, Smiling Moose Deli, Diggs Taco Shop, Pho Xpress, Grip Mediterranean Grill, and Blazes Sports Grill.

Nor is College Park just for students, something locked deep within the campus, but a 20-acre residential and retail montage that blurs the boundaries between the city and the University, inviting everyone to visit.

(Reprinted from UTA Magazine. Article by David Hopkins)



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