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CITY GROWTH

Private and public dollars help boost Ormond's downtown

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When Kale Cafe's owners opened a second store in June on Ormond Beach's main downtown street, Granada Boulevard, sales at the vegetarian cafe/juice bar soared immediately.

"It has been amazing," said Camille Holder-Brown, who owns the business with her husband, Omar Brown. "There was a lot of business from the start, and the Ormond store reached the level of sales right away that it took us a year to reach at our Daytona store."

Located in the Gaslamp Shoppes on Granada Boulevard next to Billy's Tap Room & Grill restaurant, the cafe is the newest addition to the beachside building built in 1917 that has been renovated by owner Lewis Heaster to reflect its historic character.

The Gaslamp Shoppes tell the tale of Ormond's downtown growth: private and public dollars working side by side.

Over the last decade, city officials and planners have invested millions of dollars into improvements along Granada from Orchard Street on the mainland to Atlantic Avenue on the coast. Those efforts have been aided by private investors such as Heaster in an effort to attract new businesses and foot traffic to the city's main thoroughfare. In the last year the city's tax revenue has increased by six percent, largely due to development along Granada, which includes downtown and a high-growth western stretch headed toward Interstate 95, said the city's economic development director Joe Mannarino.

"The corridor in the main commercial area is seeing a lot of retailers and new investments, which is helping the city's tax base," Mannarino said. "There's been quite a bit of private investment, which is a sign that there is a lot of promise in that area."

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS

Since Heaster bought the former Shoppes on Granada in 2013, he and his wife, Angela, have invested \$500,000 to renovate the building with flickering carriage lamps, a new façade, new signage and several upgrades to the store interiors. The couple has also brought in new tenants to the building, such as Marguerite's Florida Studio, Dollface Hair Refinery and most recently, Kale Cafe. Angela Heaster also



Ormond Beach's Granada Boulevard, the heart of the city's downtown, has been bolstered by a mix of private investment in buildings and city spending on items like replanted medians, seen here on the street's beachside section.
 News-Journal/David Tucker

plans to open Gaslamp Gift Galleries in September, which will sell work by local artists.

By supporting small independent businesses, Heaster, who is a member of the city's planning board, hopes to reflect the city's charm and create a unique atmosphere that attracts visitors.

"These are great tenants, and it helps create a boutique type of locally owned businesses that communities like Ormond need," Heaster said.

Developer Bill Jones has also invested millions in the city's downtown on makeovers to several buildings in the historic district. Last year Jones also opened 31, a club and restaurant that is modeled after a speakeasy from the Prohibition era. Jones also owns several other storefronts along Granada, including Grind Gastropub and Kona Tiki Bar and Fusion 43.

Deputy Mayor Bill Partington said that private developers like Jones and Heaster encourage others to invest in the area. Those enhancements also complement the city's \$1 million effort to revitalize medians and sidewalks on Granada. The city has also installed an irrigation system, LED lights and buried power lines along Granada, Lincoln and New Britain avenues.

"When private developers take the risk and put money in, it creates a synergy, and when the city partners with that, it can produce a fantastic, vibrant downtown," Partington said.

NEW, OLD DEFINE GRANADA

As for the future of development in the city's core area, city officials approved plans last month for a project to build docking areas under the Granada Bridge to create opportunities for boaters to stop and eat at restaurants or attend events downtown. The project is expected to cost \$150,000 to \$200,000 and is scheduled to be complete by next year.

Balancing historical preservation with economic development remains an ongoing debate as officials determine the fate of the MacDonald House, a historic home that serves as the welcome center and headquarters for the Ormond Beach Historical Society. With repair costs that could top \$500,000, city officials are considering selling the home to Heaster, who is proposing to build an outdoor restaurant that would be attached to the Gaslamp Shoppes.

"I think the community needs to look at it and say: This house has cost us hundreds of thousands of dollars and will continue to cost us hundreds of thousands of dollars in the future," Heaster said. "I have a proven track record that I can have success with a development like this."

During a planning workshop in May, city officials instructed staff to compile a historic preservation plan that would include recommendations for all of the city's historical buildings, including the MacDonald House. City Commissioners will vote on the plan at a future meeting.

Representatives from the historical society have expressed the desire to preserve the home and add a museum.

"The MacDonald House is an important cornerstone in the city and needs to stay where it is and be preserved," said Suzanne Heddy, director of the historical society.

Ormond Beach Mayor Ed Kelley said it's important to take time and look at all possibilities before coming to a conclusion on the MacDonald House.

"Let's make a decision that will be best for Ormond Beach and not just a special interest group or a small group of people," Kelley said.

Across the street from the MacDonald House, a 28,000-square-foot building at 101 E. Granada Blvd. formerly occupied by Food Lion, has been empty since 2012 and is a key component for downtown development. Mannarino said the property owners, Halifax Associates, are in negotiations with a grocer, but it was too soon to release further information.

Kelley said that while the MacDonald House and former Food Lion are important components for the future, the city's success does not hinge on these two properties.

"We have come a long way since 2010, and we wouldn't be in the shape we are in without the planning and investments that have been made," he said. "These aren't the only pieces left and they aren't that relevant to the success of the downtown area."

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