

CENTER STREET VILLAGE

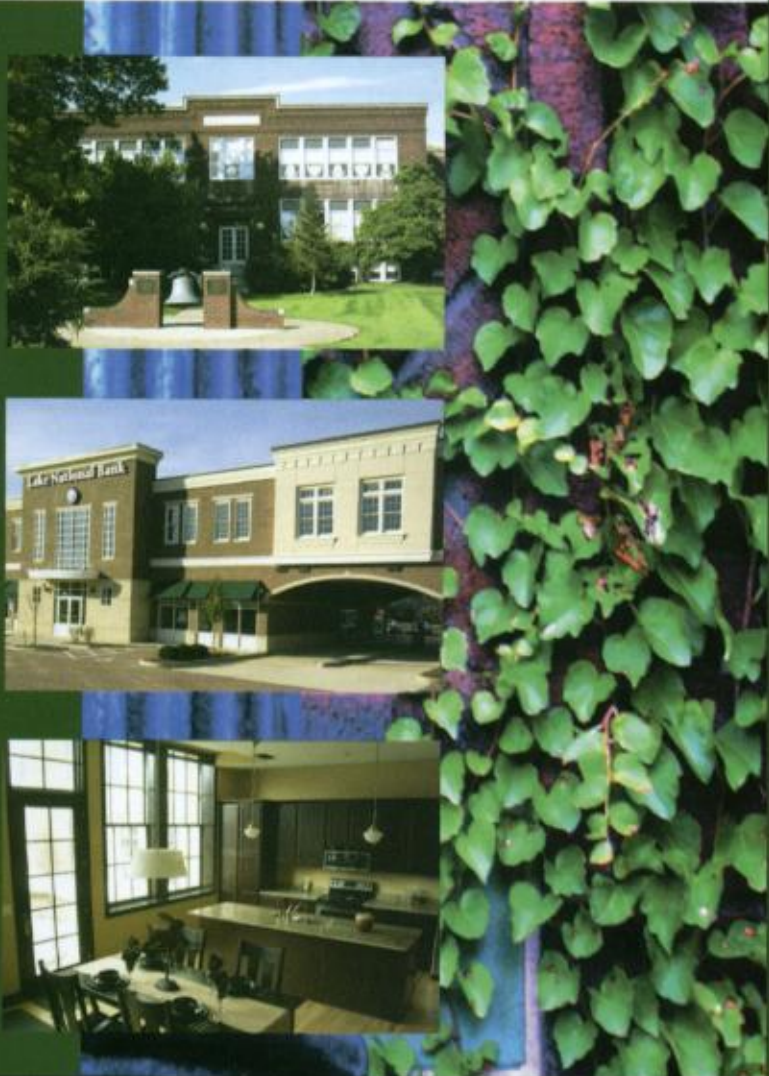
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Center of Attention

School building adapted into condo units as part of new Mentor lifestyle development

By John Elliott | Photos by Ken Krych

The city of Mentor, which has long been one of Northeast Ohio's most progressive communities for homeowners, is getting even better, thanks to the development of Center Street Village, an eight-acre residential complex located in the center of town that includes the renovation of the Center Street School into condominiums, plus the construction of two coach house buildings with two residential units each, 36 townhouses and some commercial buildings.

The lifestyle center, developed by a local development concern headed by Rick Osborne Jr., the scion of one of the city's most visible business families, gives Mentor something that it has never really had: a recognizable downtown.

The recent renovation of the Center Street School, an elementary school built in 1914, marks an important step in the development of the complex, which is owned by Osborne's company, Junior Properties Ltd., who is acting as general contractor and developer.

The school, closed in 2004 due to declining enrollment, offers an anchor to Osborne's new development at the northwest corner of Mentor Ave. (Route

20) and Center Street. He estimates the total development's price tag at around \$20 million.

The school itself has been divided into 17 condominium units. The building has been renovated in a way that preserves the 19th century character of the community but also offers the amenities of modern architecture.

Construction has begun on the coach house units just west of the school. One of the commercial buildings on Center Street, home to Lake National Bank, has also been completed. Merrill Lynch and Pizza Market are already tenants in the building. The property owner, Junior Properties, Ltd., is presently taking reser-

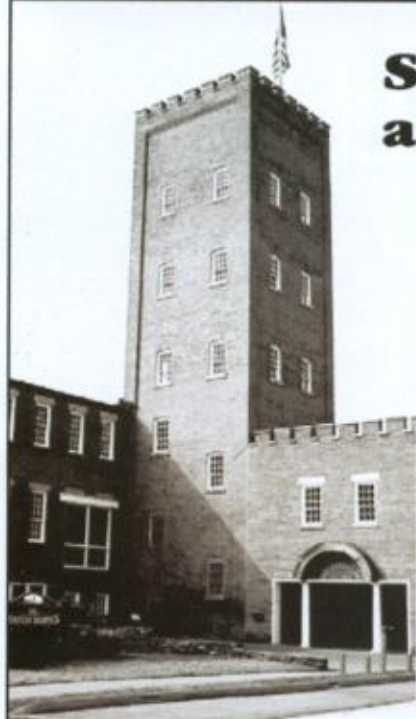
vations on townhouses, retail space and office space.

New roads connect buildings

The new and renovated buildings are connected by new access roads made of brick pavers that retain the community's historic character. The roads are constructed of permeable 3.5-inch by 14-inch pavers that drive water into the soil beneath it so that it doesn't drain into local streams.

The streets in the development are all part of the Old Mentor neighborhood that was settled in the early and mid-1880s. Homes built from that time still stand in the immediate neighborhood.

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The Old Village Hall on Mentor Ave., which borders the development, is another historic structure that has been renovated to retain its turn-of-the-century character, even though it has been transformed into an office building.

Center Street Village marks another lifestyle center for Northeast Ohio, such as Legacy Village in Lyndhurst and First & Main in Hudson, where residents will be able to work and live without having to drive.

The master plan calls for a group of townhouses that will be built along the extension of Presley Avenue, which leads to the rear of the school.

Project fulfills long-held dream

The school's renovation offers the community a chance to fulfill a long-held dream of creating a real downtown. As a development project, it afforded the design team, headed by Cleveland architectural firm FORUM Architects, the chance to combine historic spaces into state-of-the-art living.

From the city's perspective, the development answers the need to rejuvenate a section of the city that needed it. Ray Kirchner, now a Mentor councilman at large who was mayor and council president when the project was first proposed, says there was a mixture of historic buildings and run-down buildings in the area.

"It was becoming blighted," Kirchner says. "It was just run down. This project really breathed new life into the area."

Kirchner says the community is grateful that Osborne took such interest in the school building since everyone realized it would have been a lot easier and less expensive just to demolish it.

For Osborne, the project has plenty of personal meaning.

"Everyone wanted to save the school," he notes.

While he himself did not attend Center Street School, his grandfather, father and his wife all did. A big decorative school bell supported by a ground-level brick foundation in the front of the building was a gift from his uncle, Mike, in honor of his grandmother. The low brick walls bear commemorative plaques.

The school bell is one of many historical elements. Another plaque on one of the outside walls commemorates the building's place on the National Register



PRESENCE OF THE PAST Above one of the renovated school's entryways is a stone engraved with the words: "Enter to Learn."

of Historic Places. There are also globe lights hanging outside the entrances that match the original décor.

One side of the building bears a stone with the engraved words: "Enter to Learn."

Many of the original brick walls and hardwood floors have been retained. The original stage and dressing rooms in the old auditorium have found new uses as living spaces and the gymnasium has been reconfigured for indoor parking.

Excavations found during construction included old inkwells, chalkboards, desks and a large engine block.

Fascinating, but challenging

"You don't get a chance to do things like this very often," says Mike Stockhaus, superintendent and lead carpenter on the project for Junior Properties, Ltd. While the project was interesting, it was also a

challenge getting the utilities installed in spaces divided by 13-inch thick walls. The crews installed plumbing, electrical, gas and sprinkler lines, and had to make sure they were properly installed before they were covered up. Big beams and concrete pieces had to be moved out.

All the doors and windows in the building were replaced, which involved a fair amount of masonry work. The roof had to be cut in places to allow access to the newly built decks. Equipment used on the project included a gas welder and a concrete cutting saw.

Stockhaus says concrete in the auditorium had to be removed to allow the seats to be taken out. Concrete then had to be re-poured.

"Rick's vision was just amazing," Stockhaus says. "How he ever came up with the plan.... You can't give the guy enough credit."

Architects recognizes opportunity

FORUM Architects was quick to recognize the potential that the school offered for a multi-family development. The firm approached Osborne with the design and Osborne immediately envisioned his plan for a lifestyle center. Because the area was zoned single family residential and general business use, it was necessary to get the city on board, which wasn't difficult.

Peter Spittler, a long-time Mentor resident and partner in the FORUM Architects firm, had previously recognized the opportunity that the school property offered, explains Denver Brooker, also a principal of FORUM and the lead designer for the project.

"We had developed a master plan concept for the property prior to the sale



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PURVEYING PLANS Rick Osborne Jr. (at right), of Junior Properties LLC, goes over drawings and future developments with *Properties* writer John Elliott.

of the school and associated property," he says.

Converting schools to residential use is not uncommon nowadays, Brooker notes.

"There are other examples in this part of the country where schools are converted to residential," he says. One reason developers choose to convert schools is these buildings contain a lot of character that would be hard to duplicate from scratch.

"It comes with some features that typically developers wouldn't put into a new building," he says, such as a 12-foot high ceiling and eight-foot high windows.

Renovations include the addition of steel framed, cantilevered, second floor balconies.

"That makes the units all the more interesting and unique," Brooker says. "The units lend themselves to being fit out in any number of ways."

While each living unit has a unique design, all retain a loft-like character, similar to what one might expect in Cleveland's Warehouse District.

"You still have some kind of relationship with the building's original use," Brooker explains.

City supports the project

The city was more than willing to work with Osborne to get the zoning he needed. Scott Marn, who was the councilman for the ward where the property is located, says Osborne's original plan called for a lifestyle center when he first

saw it in the fall of 2005. Marn, who is now a councilman at large, says he sat down with Osborne and examined possibilities for a new zoning classification.

The city had a historic preservation plan that it had never formalized. They decided to take aspects of the historic preservation plan and aspects of the city's first planned unit development, Newell Creek, in coming up with a new, mixed use zoning classification.

"My main concern was preservation of the Center Street School," Marn says.

Now that the school has been renovated, he is very pleased by the results.

"I think it's great," he says. "I love the architecture. I love the brick pavers. The sewers are bone dry even after a storm."

"It gives us the opportunity – at the center of town and at the juncture of two important streets – to create a retail and residential environment unlike anything else we have in this city and one that takes advantage of an old school," says Ron Traub, Mentor's economic development director.

Traub says the city planning commission, which approved the plan, was very impressed by the Osborne design team's technical thoroughness and vision.

"It was a very complete picture," he says. "I find it a very exciting project. It retains a historic building in the community and it promotes a type of lifestyle we didn't have in the city of Mentor or in Lake County."

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A new lifestyle center

Traub characterizes the project as "urbane" lifestyle, whereby residents can have all of their needs met within walking distance and at the same time gives the city a traditional "village center."

"We had a scattering of old buildings but not a historic downtown," he says.

The center will bring a new clientele to Mentor as well, Traub notes. The individuals who will live in this area are people who would otherwise live in Cleveland's Warehouse District, he says. These are affluent young people.

"There is a certain vibrancy that younger individuals bring to a neighborhood," he said.

"It's going to take a certain type of individual who wants to be in the school," agrees Mentor Mayor Robert Shiner. "It's marketable or they wouldn't have done it. It opens up to different demographics. We have a little of everything in the city."

Part of the building was demolished in late 2006. The entire inside was gutted and the basement, which mostly housed a boiler, has been filled in. The exterior brick walls have been pressure-washed with walnut spray.

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The roof of the remaining 32,000-square-foot structure was overlaid with a foundation that has allowed for terraces for the second story units that give magnificent views.

Metal doors replaced the original doors to meet the fire code.

New heating was installed, providing temperature control in individual units. All units will also have individual security modules. New water and sanitary lines and a modern sprinkler system have also been installed.

The renovated gymnasium allows for 14 indoor parking spaces, complemented by first floor parking beneath the adjacent coach house units. Each resident will have two parking spaces.

"You come in here and you still know it's a school, but at the same time, it doesn't necessarily have to be," Osborne says.

He explains that the building offers three different grade options, a standard model and two upgrades. Some units feature skylights.

Living spaces rich in amenities

Living units feature granite kitchen counters, modern appliances, cherry-stained oak wood Kraft Maid cabinets and built-in desks. The cherry-stained oaks can also be found in baseboards, windowsill trims and stairway railings. Tenants will have an easy time carrying these themes with furniture and picture frames, as some of the finished units already demonstrate.

The massive, double-hung, school-room windows allow for ample light and

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views of the newly installed landscaping. Beige-colored walls match the hardwood maple floors. Many dining room areas have views of a new courtyard. One courtyard has a round patio covered with an overlay that resembles a flag stone slate.

The 380-square-foot round patio was installed by Ultimate Overlay, based in Huntsburg. An acrylic surface was poured over a concrete oval, notes Al Hirsh, owner of the company. He says the substance is 100% seamless and completely non-porous; the surface is between 1/16th to 1/8th of an inch thick.

The first floor hallway retains much of the school building's character with quarry tile floors and wood trim on the walls.

Two units subdivide the school stage, with the dining and living areas on the original stage floor. The proscenium arch appears on the second floor of these units, another reminder of the building's former use. The ceiling has



FITTING FEATURES Living units feature granite kitchen counters, modern appliances and cherry-stained oak wood Kraft Maid cabinets

Photo by Greg Invernizzi

been removed to expose the original steel and wood frame.

The units all follow a three-color design, explains Laura Gills, the Mentor-based interior designer who did the project's interior design work: totally tan for the first floor, August moon in the second floor guest bedrooms and the hallway, and silver mist in the master bedroom.

Gills said there was a lot of measuring required by the tradesmen.

"Almost no two units were alike," she says. "You're constantly mixing contemporary elements with restoration elements. The challenge was to know when to switch to which one."

"I like the fact that I've mixed woods and nobody's commented on it," she says. "It was purposeful but it works. It came out with that warm but nostalgic impression that we wanted. There are not many projects of this sort out there."

Gills noted that some of the millwork in the walls features a dark espresso-like finish that matches the kitchen cabinets. It required a two process staining.

"I tried to keep the nostalgia alive from the old building," she says.

The closet floors have special overlays that were installed using a unique process, Gills notes.

"When you're dealing with existing surfaces, you have thickness issues," she says.

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The task is to ensure that the surfaces of the different areas are even.

The second floor of this unit has the master bedroom with walk-in closets and a bathroom complete with a shower, Jacuzzi, dual sinks with under cabinets, and a bathroom storage area. The walk-in closets and bathroom storage areas were installed by CSU Cabinets and Closets of Willoughby.

Company president Michael Ehrhardt says installing the closets was a challenge due to the tight spaces. He is grateful to Osborne for providing him with a mechanized lift to get the closet materials in through a window to the second floor.

"[Osborne's organization] went above and beyond helping everyone out, making sure everything went smoothly," Ehrhardt says.

While the closet spaces were small, they were also high, and Ehrhardt attempted to take advantage of this. Some of the closet shelves are eight feet tall.



TOUCH OF CLASS Massive, double-hung, school-room windows allow for ample light and views of the newly installed landscaping from within the living units.

"Trying to maximize space is a challenge," he says.

He used melamine shelving and rattan baskets.

"It was fun," Gills says. "An older space offers its challenges, especially for the trades."

The master bedroom has a view of the outdoor patio.

built-in desk in the open living area. Kitchen and living areas have overhanging lamps.

From the roof terrace overlooking the intersection of Mentor Ave. (Route 20) and Center Street, it is possible to see the farmhouse where Osborne's grandfather Jerome still lives. On the north side, it's possible to see the house where his father, Rick Sr., grew up.

The two-story Lake National Bank on Center Street also has the contemporary traditional style, featuring traditional brick with stone cornices and multi-

Living units offer unique spaces

Each unit has its own design scheme. In one unit, the stairway in the first floor offers an exciting visual backdrop to the



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HOME STRETCH The Center Street Village project, which also includes groupings of four to six townhouses, should be completed by this fall.

pane, double-hung windows. It offers modern amenities, such as an elevator. The bank was established in 2005 by Jerome Osborne Sr. At 85, he is still active as bank chairman.

"Center Street Village has been a great project to work on," says Sean Rogers, of Blue Line Painting & Contracting, who provided services at Lake National Bank. "Rick Osborne, Jr. knows how to bring together a team of quality contractors that will get him the results he expects."

The bank is the first phase of the project's commercial use portion. The next will be between the bank and the school building.

Townhouses with matching design

There will be groupings of four to six townhouses. Brooker says the townhouses will be similar in style to the coach houses, with multi-pane, double-hung windows and steep pitched roofs. The entire project should be completed by the end of summer.



City officials are excited that the project has created new possibilities for other areas.

"It's one of the biggest and best things we've got going," says Scott Marn, the councilman. The new zoning classification will make it possible to preserve other historic structures in the city and create a better environment.

Ron Traub, the economic development director, says that he is looking forward to the construction of the community center, to be located west of the townhouses.

Brooker is most proud of the variety of living spaces the project has provided.

"Living in a renovated school is unique in itself," he says. "That, plus the fact that each unit is unique, provides individuality for every resident."

Once it is complete, Center Street Village will provide Mentor with some things it has never had: a real downtown and a modern lifestyle center.

It will be a fitting contribution from one of the community's most committed developers. **P**

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