

Town homes unveiled at UA

Leaders cut ribbon for first phase of Spicer Village

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Two dozen city, business and civic leaders came out on a rainy Tuesday morning to celebrate what is being called "a new day" for Akron's University Park neighborhood.

Mayor Don Plusquellic — who cut the ribbon opening the first phase of Spicer Village that will feature 25 new town homes — said the project will "get people to come back to this area . . . that's very exciting."

Spicer Village is an urban development in the 40-block University Park area west and south of the University of Akron and a stone's throw from Summa Health System.

Guests at the ribbon cutting toured the two completed three-story town-home units and said they were impressed.

Ken Stapleton, executive director of the nonprofit University Park Alliance, said the town homes will bring "new perspective" to a neighborhood that has seen hard times.

"This project along with other improvements to this neighborhood will create a great urban lifestyle," he said.

Stapleton noted that less than 20 percent of the housing in University Park is owner-occupied. And much of it, which is nearly a century old, has been converted to student rentals.

"This type of high-quality housing will bring stability back to this neighborhood," Stapleton said.

Plusquellic pointed out that University Park was built more than a century ago to provide housing to people moving to Akron to work in the rubber factories.

"It was built quickly, but it was never meant to be here 100 years," Plusquellic said.

"This is a great opportunity to take this neighborhood in a new direction," he said.

Spicer Village, located on Brown and Power streets, is the first of many projects geared toward revitalizing the area around UA.

According to the developer, Philip Maynard of ASW Properties Ltd., the two- and three-bedroom town homes are between 1,121 and 2,175 square feet and start in the \$170,000s.

One of those in attendance at the ribbon-cutting was longtime University Park resident Don Drumm. In 1970, the sculptor/designer moved into the area, where he established his studio and gallery.

"If this (Spicer Village) takes off it will be a godsend for the whole area; it could mean the rebirth of the neighborhood," Drumm said.

Since moving to Crouse Street more than 30 years ago, Drumm and his wife, Lisa, have purchased 12 parcels of land that includes eight properties. The Drumms were recognized by the mayor for their efforts to revitalize University Park.



"This area used to be called Goosetown," Drumm said, sharing a story about his ancestral ties to the neighborhood.

Drumm said he wasn't aware prior to his moving to the neighborhood in 1970 that his mother had spent a portion of her childhood three streets from his studio.

"There was a family story I heard growing up about my mother being bit by a goose when she was a little girl," Drumm said, noting that he didn't relate the story to the University Park neighborhood until years later.

The artist, who grew up in Warren, said he didn't realize until he was an adult that he had roots in Akron. Drumm explained that his grandparents divorced when his mother was young, and his grandmother moved with her children to Warren.

Drumm said the University Park neighborhood was once known as "Goosetown" because of the large population of German immigrants who lived there and raised geese.

"They raised them for goose liver," Drumm said.

The developers of Spicer Village have stated that one of the reasons the area was selected was because of the efforts of the Drumms to revitalize the neighborhood.

Drumm said he believes the newtown homes will be attractive to young home buyers who work at the university or at area hospitals.

UA is helping its employees buy at Spicer Village by offering to pay \$10,000 of the purchase price. The university has set aside \$200,000 in down-payment assistance.