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Union Hill's future builds upon history
Expansion project adds living space to 29th and McGee
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Bob Frye is borrowing a page from Chicago for a Union Hill expansion that will add luxury condominiums, apartments and retail to the neighborhood south of Crown Center.

The developer is calling the \$50 million addition Founders at Union Hill and, in a nod to history, is naming its new buildings after several Kansas City greats buried next door at Union Cemetery. Honoring the dead aside, Frye believes he's building a very good place to live in the hillside quadrant southwest of 29th Street and Gillham Road.

McGee Street between 29th and Gillham will be the hub of the addition, with a renovated **Greenlease Cadillac** building on the east side and several new buildings on the west. At street level - where there will be diagonal parking - Frye wants to attract a variety of retailers, including a cafe, bank branch and dry cleaner.

Above the commercial space along McGee, and up the hill along Oak Street, will be townhouses, apartments and condominiums. Residential prices range from a studio apartment expected to rent for \$700 a month to a penthouse condo projected to cost \$1.3 million. In all, there will be 45,000 square feet of commercial space, 216 apartments, 30 condos and 30 townhouses.

At the north edge of the development at 29th and McGee will be five-story building with storage on the ground floor, a three-level health club with swimming pool, and a 4,500-square-foot penthouse occupying the top floor.

And in the grand, 6,500-square-foot showroom of the old car dealership, where Cadillacs were once displayed on Persian rugs, Frye hopes to park a high-end restaurant.

The renovation of the **Greenlease Cadillac** building is scheduled to be completed next summer, with the additional new construction expected to be finished in summer 2006. Once it's completed, Frye wants to continue the Union Hill development farther north along Gillham to 27th Terrace.

Frye was inspired by the Lincoln Park neighborhood near the Chicago Loop, an area that he said blends quality residential design with convenient access to shopping, theater and other urban amenities. He believes there is a mix of incomes and lifestyles in Kansas City that will find his development similarly well suited.

"What we've found in Union Hill and what makes urban neighborhoods exciting is that while there's diversity in terms of age and income levels, what brings you together is a common interest. We hope to create

a community where you can live and enjoy life."

Frye was a participant in the development of the original Union Hill project in the mid-1980s. He bought out the interest of the original developer in 1988, and has been building it out ever since. The neighborhood now includes 150 apartments, 150 townhouses, 200 hotel rooms and 100,000 square feet of commercial space. Seventy existing homes also have been restored.

Kathy Burke, the president of the Union Hill Neighborhood Association, said Frye has worked closely with the neighborhood to come up with a compatible development plan for the addition. "I think it's going to be great," she said. "It's also good for our neighborhood because we had some problem apartment buildings in that area that were demolished."

The new addition is right across Gillham Road from the Gillham Row condominium project. It includes 40 townhouses, 12 apartments and a new coffee shop, and a second phase is expected to get under way soon.

"We're thrilled about Gillham Row," Frye said. "The style is very different than ours, but that's what is great about an urban area."

Frye hardly is working in isolation. A few blocks west of Frye's project, work is under way on a \$200 million headquarters for the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City at 29th and Main streets. About a half mile west, the new \$370 million Internal Revenue Service Processing Center is under construction in and around the former Main Post Office on

Pershing Road. Hospital Hill, with its thousands of health professionals, service employees and students, is only a few blocks north.

The big neighbor however, is Crown Center. It's about a five-block walk from the front door of the Crown Center shopping center to Founders at Union Hill. The new offices of the Shook Hardy & Bacon law firm are even closer.

Frye said the construction of the law firm's 24-story office tower made it much easier to proceed with his project.

Bill Lucas, president of Crown Center Redevelopment, said Frye's decision to proceed, along with the success of Gillham Row, has his company rethinking its strategy for developing the remainder of its property. Crown Center still has 14 acres south of its main complex reserved for future development. Crown Center sold the **Greenlease Cadillac** building to Frye for his development.

"We're certainly encouraged by what we see going on," Lucas said. "It's surprising us a little how deep the market is."

Lucas said Crown Center Redevelopment is looking strongly at further development.

"There is more office to be done," he said. "But the market also is ripe for more residential. Our development in the future may not be as dominated by office."

Frye said the Founders at Union Hill project emphasizes architecture and interior design along with streetscaping. The architect of the project is Jim Sullivan of Sullivan Palmer Architects, and 180 Degree Architects and Patti Banks &

Associates have assisted with the master plan and streetscaping. Again, Chicago provided a model. Frye, who received his degree in architecture from Kansas State University, said he was inspired by the sidewalk planter islands and pedestrian street lights of Michigan Avenue.

"The streetscaping is maybe the most important thing we're doing," he said. "We want to create active sidewalks."

To help sell the development, Frye has built a large information center on the main floor of the **Greenlease Cadillac** building. Two furnished model condos also have been built. Katie Heschmeyer of Reece & Nichols is the leasing agent for the condominiums. The official marketing campaign is scheduled to kick off Friday.

The project has been approved for tax incentives under the Chapter 353

program, which allows a 100 percent property tax abatement for 10 years and a 50 percent abatement for 15 years. It also is part of a tax increment financing district. The city also is helping pay for the streetscape improvements.

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On the Web

For more architectural renderings of the Founders at Union Hill project, go to www.kansascity.com.

Graphic (color illustration)

Green Tie Creative and Arnold Imaging

Residential buildings will be part of the first phase of redevelopment looking north on Oak Street toward Crown Center.