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Gateway Quarter project making mark on Vine St.

Business Courier of Cincinnati - June 15, 2007 by [Lucy May](#) Senior Staff Reporter

STORY IMAGES



Gateway Quarter along Vine Street in Over-the-Rhine has more than 35 percent of its condominiums either sold or under contract and is selling and leasing commercial space even faster.

The project has transformed the corner of 12th and Vine streets, once a notorious crime center in the historic neighborhood.

"That was a rough corner," said retired Kroger Co. CEO Joseph Pichler, who now chairs the Cincinnati Center City Development Corp.'s effort to revitalize Over-the-Rhine. "When you have a corner with one business and 170 police calls, you know something's wrong."

But instead of people hanging out on the street waiting to buy or sell drugs, contractors are hanging drywall in condos fetching anywhere from \$90,000 to more than \$300,000. Metronation is selling coffee tables with woven leather tops. And architects are drawing up plans for Jean-Robert de Cavel's latest café concept.

In all, 93 condo units are being developed along Vine Street, with 34 sold or under contract. And 10 of 13 commercial spots are either sold, leased or under letters of intent.

"It's the start of a long process, but it's a good start," Pichler said. "I'm guardedly optimistic about the continued sales and success. And the great thing is we own 100 buildings. If the sales are successful, and the debt reloads our financials, we can develop some of the other 100 that we own. The pieces are in place."

The nonprofit development agency known as 3CDC quietly assembled the buildings along Vine Street for the project. Four different developers are revamping the properties in this first phase of work - Urban Sites, the Model Group and the team of Northpointe Group and B2B Equities.

Sales are going so well that 3CDC is laying the groundwork for the project's second phase. Cleanup on a building at the corner of 13th and Vine streets has begun, and another 40-plus condo units in that building and others nearby could be on the market by next summer, said Chad Munitz, 3CDC's executive vice president of development.

"It's a marathon, not a sprint," Munitz said. "It feels good to be ahead in the first part of it, but we're in this for the long haul. That's the only way that this thing is going to survive - to be steady and move forward."

Veteran Over-the-Rhine property manager and developer Jim Moll is selling the condos on behalf of the developers out of a Gateway Quarter sales office at 12th and Vine streets. He said 3CDC's involvement has made all the difference.

"They made it easier," said Moll, who is representing the developers for Builder Resources, a residential brokerage firm. "There are so many fewer hoops than dealing with the government directly. And the No. 1 hardest thing in this neighborhood is acquisition."

Plus, buyers understand that 3CDC owns many more properties for future phases of development, said Matt O'Connor, sales and marketing director for Builders Resource.

"People know it's not just 11 buildings being rehabbed, and they're out of here," he said. "I think it's been successful because it has a long-term plan behind it that's going to work. And I think people see that."

It certainly helped convince George Crawford and his partners to relocate their Metronation store. For nearly a year, they looked for a larger space to add a furniture line. They shopped all over downtown and were approached by Kathleen Norris, who is marketing the commercial space for Builder Resources.

"We said no," Crawford said. "Then we came up and looked and were impressed."

Metronation moved from Elm Street on June 3. It sits next to the future home of de Cavel's new café, which Munitz said is looking to open by October.

Around the corner, Fifth Third Bank is planning a City Living mortgage office with an ATM, Moll said, and Model Group will have its real estate office, too. A second location for MiCA Contemporary Crafts and a hair salon are planned for Vine Street between 12th and 13th streets. And south of 12th Street, City Roots, an urban gardening store, and the environmentally focused general store Park + Vine are open.

It's a far cry from the rundown buildings that stood mostly empty just a year ago.

"There's a great energy in the neighborhood," Crawford said. "It has a very good vibe."

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