

The Greenville News **Mills Mill area sees signs of new life**

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City and community leaders knew the conversion of the former Mills Mill into a 105-unit condo project would be a boost. But they expected it to take a few years to revitalize the surrounding area.

Now, with plastic sheets still covering hundreds of empty windows and crews still working on the old textile mill's insides, grading has already started nearby for a medical building, a shopping center and a fast food restaurant.

The developers said they weren't expecting the added projects, said Pete Brett, director of development with Centennial American Properties, which is developing The Lofts. "The mill itself is an anchor to that end of town," Brett said. "We all think that it's fantastic because that is the entranceway into the city."

Willie Choyce, 36, said he welcomes all the changes because he expects they will bring more police patrols and make the area safer.

"I think it's wonderful," said Choyce, who lives on Guess Street.

Frank Hammond, who sold the property for the restaurant, said the Mills Mill project has increased interest in the area that is one of the main arteries into downtown.

"It's a good corridor, but I think it has been underutilized over the years," he said. "The Mills project will put a lot of bodies over there on a daily basis."

The new projects will be in the middle of the Green Avenue, Mills Mill and Dunean Mill communities, which straddle the city and county line and are experiencing rebirths. Parts of the neighborhoods have been blighted by abandoned homes, garbage in front of houses and crime. The city is adding housing and better streetscaping along Green Avenue. The Mills and Dunean communities formed a neighborhood group to clean up their neighborhoods.

The Lofts' developers announced plans this week for a 14,000 square foot retail and office center across on the corner of Lynn Street and Mills.

Earth movers and dump trucks hauled off dirt and debris from houses from the site that borders Brushy Creek.

The shopping center will use circa-1900 brick from a demolished textile mill to complement the neighboring residential development. It is expected to open by mid-summer 2004.

"It's good for the city and good for the area," Brett said. "It has probably put some faith in the other owners."

Workers also have graded two sites adjacent to 106-year-old brick structure.

A 16,000 square foot medical building is planned across Guess Street from the mill, said Jim Faulkner, a partner with Mills Avenue Investments. The property was once the mill baseball field. Faulkner said his group created their plans before The Lofts was announced.

"It's hard to say what kind of impact one will have on the other, but it's positive because both are new," he said. "Long term and even short term it's positive what's going on in the whole area down there."

Spinx Investments, a subsidiary of the Spinx Company, plans to build a Krytsal Burger less than two hundreds yards from the mill, but no completion date is set, company officials said.

People can eat the Tennessee-based restaurant chain's small, square hamburgers with steamed-in onion flavor in 426 stores through the southeast, but this would be the first in Greenville.

John Boyanoski covers the city of Greenville. He can be reached at 298-4065.