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'European-inspired' city advertised CRA ad promotes pedestrian-friendly downtown

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Originally posted on January 29, 2008

After reading a full-page advertisement urging people to "Discover Cape Coral A European Inspired Community," resident Pat Holliday said she became upset.

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"We should be pleased to have a Florida city," Holliday said. "To be so heavy-handed and say we should have a European city is beyond me."

..... ADVERTISEMENT

The ad was produced by the downtown Cape Coral Community Redevelopment Agency and also appeared in the magazine Discover Florida.

CRA chairman John Jacobsen said the European market is a good source of income in Southwest Florida, whether from tourists on vacation, developers interested in building here or people considering moving to the area. The advertisement, Jacobsen said, is intended to tap into that.

He also said European architecture is in style at the moment.

"Developers working in downtowns are designing European-flavored communities," he said. "Whether you call it Mediterranean or meta-Caribbean or whatever, but we are certainly in touch with what is en vogue for architecture right now," he said.

The CRA does not require any particular types of architecture, Jacobsen said. It does offer grant incentives for making areas more pedestrian-friendly, a primary goal of the agency.

"If you want to build in an art deco style, we don't control that and we don't dictate architecture styles," he said. "What we really want is to recapture, if you will, the way that European cities work."

Holliday said she understands that desire, but hopes downtown can keep a distinctly Florida look and feel. She moved here from New York about 15 years ago, and said she was drawn by the canals and the Key West-Bahamas feel to the community.

Architecture discussions aside, some business owners in downtown Cape Coral

question whether the ads are really accomplishing anything.

"We have a lot of German tourists show up here and rent houses, but we need more than just that," said Bill Philp, owner of Cape Dog and Deli. "Downtown is dying and is going to be a ghost town eventually if they don't get their act together."

Jacobsen said the marketing strategy for downtown is working in attracting a mix of residential and commercial development. In coming weeks, he said, Cape Grande Collection will open up near the Cape Coral Bridge and bring with it new housing, retail and food options.

"When we talk about European-inspired, what we want is a comfortable setting where the streets and cars and sidewalks form a relationship to each other that make you feel comfortable walking around," he said.

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