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Sal's getting a new look

By JEFF CULL, jcull@news-press.com

Sal Lanzieri likes the plans for transforming Cape Coral's downtown so much he's spending an extra \$36,000 to give his pizza shop that Mediterranean look that downtown leaders covet.

"It was going to be a white building, then the city came out with its master plan — it grew from there," said Lanzieri of the major renovation he's undertaken at Sal's Pizza Parlor on Cape Coral Parkway.

Lanzieri's the first of what the Community Redevelopment Agency hopes will be an onslaught of downtown businesses re-creating the city hub into a pedestrian-friendly shopping and dining experience — a sort of Parisian boulevard meets middle America.

And, while CRA leaders try to attract the big developers with grandiose plans, it's encouraging local businesses to remodel or build with grant money, help with permits and design consultation.

"It's important to track the big national firms, but it's the local businesses that give the downtown the unique character and identity," said Chet Hunt, executive director of the agency.

It wasn't long ago that the downtown plan was little more than a few fancy renderings on a wall in Hunt's office. There was a lot of talk about how the city would transform itself from a poorly planned commercial area with 1960s architecture into a Third Street South in Naples.

It's not easy or cheap to get the look CRA leaders envision for the downtown.

Lanzieri, whose reputation is for top-quality pizza, had to upgrade nearly all of the exterior features of his 1,000-square-foot expansion. The roof tiles will be authentic clay, not the less expensive concrete. The architectural stucco banding will be solid, not backed with foam, as is normal with that type of construction, said John Averill, president of Associated Construction and Development Inc., the contractor on the job.

Lanzieri's also willing to give up his driveway on Cape Coral Parkway.

The CRA is trying to eliminate those driveways or curb cuts as much as possible. They say it's safer — cars travel the parkway at a pretty good clip, making negotiating turns dangerous — and promotes the walking traffic that is key to the downtown's appeal, Hunt said.

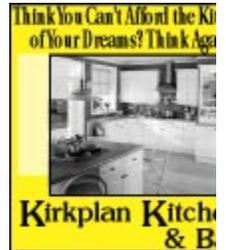
But it's still a gamble.

"Everyone's nervous about it but me," Lanzieri said.

Customers of Sal's Pizza will still be able to access his parking lot from the alley and city



INNOVATOR: Sal Lanzieri calls a delivery driver by radio from the kitchen of his restaurant, Sal's Pizza Parlor. Lanzieri is the first business owner to begin remodeling to conform to Cape Coral's redevelopment plans for the downtown area. *STEPHEN HAYFORD/news-press.com*



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parking lot in front of the Kash n' Karry Food Store.

Codes not complete

Downtown builders don't have to conform to the requirements of the master plan yet. The codes that will define the look of all new buildings haven't been completed.

They're expected by the end of the year, Hunt said.

The new building rules are intended to make developing in downtown less restrictive and less bureaucratic. It takes out a layer of bureaucracy and makes the permit process quicker.

It also allows for buildings such as combination commercial and residential structures that are not allowed currently by city zoning laws.

The city also is trying to work out a way so that downtown developers can share a stormwater system. That will free up valuable land for buildings by not requiring developers to set aside land for water retention systems.

But until the complete rewrite of the building codes is complete, much large development is at a standstill.

"The biggest hurdle is getting the regulations done," said John Jacobsen, a member of the CRA board. "We've actually stymied a few developments."

Some aren't waiting

Powell Construction, like Lanzieri, isn't waiting for the codes to go into effect to build a 10,000-square-foot building in the downtown.

"We've designed the building in accordance with the new CRA codes," said Scott Hertz, vice president for Powell.

But it wasn't easy.

"It's been kind of a lengthy process — it's a whole new process," he said. "We're just trying to support the redevelopment efforts of the city."

Hertz said the two-story building, set to begin in about a month, will feature The Grape Escape, a wine shop, on the ground floor and office condominiums above. The building will have the Mediterranean look, complete with a sidewalk cafe.

Others are also looking.

In Bimini Basin, a developer is planning a large residential project that could be the downtown's jewel.

"The project's going to happen," City Manager Terry Stewart told city council last week. "It will probably double the value of the downtown."

The developer's consultants are close-lipped about the plans but said earlier this year that it could be worth about \$140 million.

But the CRA board knows that for every big project it will need dozens of Sal Lanzieris.

"He was very proactive right from the beginning," Hunt said about Lanzieri. "He's a good example of how we want this thing to work."

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