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News

The Ypsilanti Courier

A Heritage Newspaper
Weekly Publication



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Downtown landmark reborn as lofts

Couple saw revival potential in Kresge building

By William Zilke, Special Writer

PUBLISHED: April 7, 2005

When Eric and Karen Maurer first set their sights on the old Kresge Building at 200 W. Michigan Avenue in downtown Ypsilanti they saw more than a rundown old building. They saw a vibrant future for a downtown long neglected.



Courier photo by Mark Mueller

Mason Craig Shankwiler works on constructing an arch in one of the apartments featuring lofts in the former Kresge Building being renovated in downtown Ypsilanti.

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The Kresge Building was built in 1875 and served as a market. In 1900, the stately brick structure was used by a pharmaceutical company and 25 years later was bought by the S.S. Kresge Company. The building still bears the Kresge label. A five and dime store it remained until the mid-1960s when it was for all practical purposes closed up for good. After almost 40 years all that remained in the 25,000-square-foot structure were distant echoes and ghosts of a more prosperous time. There she stood empty until 2001 when by sheer luck the Maurer's discovered the Kresge Building.

"We were sitting at Louie's Cafe and saw the "for sale" sign across the street," said Karen, "We fell in love with the place."

The hardest part for the Maurer's was securing financing for the massive overhaul of the building and conversion into loft space.

"We got a tax abatement and help from the Historical District Commission and Downtown Development Authority," said Karen.

The second and third floors were used as a boarding house for much of the building's history. It held a racquetball court and Karen also believes there used to be a brothel upstairs. During renovation Eric found two disintegrating wooden barrels in the ceiling space.

"They could have held alcohol or they could have been put there for good luck," he said of the mysterious find.

Now with the help of their partners Stuart Beal and George Beal, those old, cramped boardinghouse cells with a communal bathroom and eight separate chimneys for potbellied stoves will be transformed into 20 spacious, modern lofts. The two first floor retail spaces are being re-opened and the basement is also slated as a business establishment. Studio One in Detroit did the architectural designs and historic building experts like Rod Rupert assisted the Maurers in keeping with the Historic District's guidelines.



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With nightspots like Pub 13 and Club Divine luring young people back into the downtown area the Maurer's see a renewed and prosperous downtown.

"Our lofts will bring 40 people with expendable cash and help spark a revival. SWe already have eight of the lofts leased to open on May 1. Downtown Ypsilanti is starting to turn the corner."

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