

## Battle Creek's Victorian Age

Kathleen Eriksen, Jani Hart and Patrick Halpin hope downtown redevelopment will lead Battle Creek to new prosperity. PAGE 3B

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Uptown Village  
Grand Rapids, MI



### On the Corner of Opportunity & Possibility

In reality, Lighthouse Communities' Uptown Village is on the corner of Diamond Ave. and Wealthy St. But for the neighborhood it supports, the Village's three-story affordable housing and office/retail building might as well sit on the corner of Opportunity and Possibility. Rockford is proud to have worked on such an important community development project.

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# Battle Creek's Victorian Age

By Andy Domino | MiBiz  
adomino@mibiz.com

**BATTLE CREEK** – The **Battle Creek Unlimited (BCU)** downtown development office is focused on re-energizing the Cereal City by getting more people to live downtown.

An example of that effort is **Victoria Flats**, a condominium project on West Michigan Avenue and Carlisle Street that is now accepting tenants. An open house for Phase 1 of the project took place in mid-October.

The development is a redesign of a 100-year-old Battle Creek hotel, featuring new elements like a steam room and a waterfall that runs down one wall. The mixture of historical and modern looks is what BCU Downtown Development Director Kathleen Eriksen hopes will attract condo and business owners.

"They're unique living spaces," Eriksen told *MiBiz*, "unique architecture and independent businesses you can only find in downtown. Restoration of an existing building in a city center is a very 'green' choice."

Of course, restoration was only one option. The alternative – down with the old building and up with a new structure.

"When you bring in big trucks to remove the building debris and dispose of it all in a landfill, produce all new building materials, deliver materials and rebuild – the environmental price tag is even greater when the new construction is built on green space, contributing to urban sprawl," she said. "In my mind, that leaves a pretty big footprint on Mother Earth."

About 500 people visited during the Phase 1 open house, and "quite a few" are considering moves into the Victoria Flats property. As *MiBiz* went to press, one unit was still available, though Eriksen expected to close a deal on that condominium this month. There are already six preliminary tenants for Phase 2 of the project. That phase calls for 18 more condominiums selling for \$109,000-\$199,000, with most selling for about \$129,000. Construction on Phase 2 is set for this winter, with move-in dates anticipated for the end of 2008.

Phase 3 would follow that, adding five more condos and space for several other stores or restaurants. Eriksen wants to see the kind of retailers that are attracted to an urban downtown environment, like gift shops and art galleries. One unit would house an upscale restaurant, the kind that might offer an outdoor cafe in the summer, and Eriksen is especially looking to attract ethnic restaurants to downtown. Phase 1 is at the southeast corner of West Michigan and Carlisle, across the water from Cereal City USA, one of Battle Creek's landmarks.

"They face the Battle Creek River, and they're steps from the linear path," she said. "There's a city parking structure across the street and carports in the building. Property values are pretty affordable; now is the time to get in."



The stairway may be steep and narrow – and lit by a see-through fireplace – but developers believe redeveloping Battle Creek's old buildings into downtown residential centers like Victoria Flats are key to the city's revitalization.

The Victoria Flats project is part of the city's five-year downtown improvement plan unveiled this summer. The plan calls for more restaurants, a grocery store that could offer food alongside Battle Creek's farmer's market and "impulse buy" stores, which would draw walk-in visitors for items they couldn't find at a chain store.

"We're accepting business plans now," Eriksen said. "We want to have sustainable businesses downtown. If they've been in business for a year, they're sustainable."

Battle Creek appears to be taking a cue from condominium builders in other downtown areas, offering amenities for an active, often younger audience.

"We have a lot of people who

work at the Federal Center, the Kellogg Company, the Kellogg Foundation and (auto parts supplier) Denso," she said. "We also have a lot of empty nesters, who are alone after their kids leave home. They would like to find somewhere to live that's smaller and easier to manage."

Battle Creek has been criticized for a lack of things to do downtown, especially compared to Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, which are undergoing revitalizations of their own. The Battle Creek Downtown Partnership's plan is to provide new places to live, using the lower prices and visual appeal of the Victoria Flats condominiums as a starting point. Once people move downtown, that residential base can encourage commercial development in the city. Condo buyers have almost two dozen places to eat, and Eriksen said there are other kinds of activities already happening in town.



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## FYI

### Victoria Flats

**Restoration cost:** \$375,000

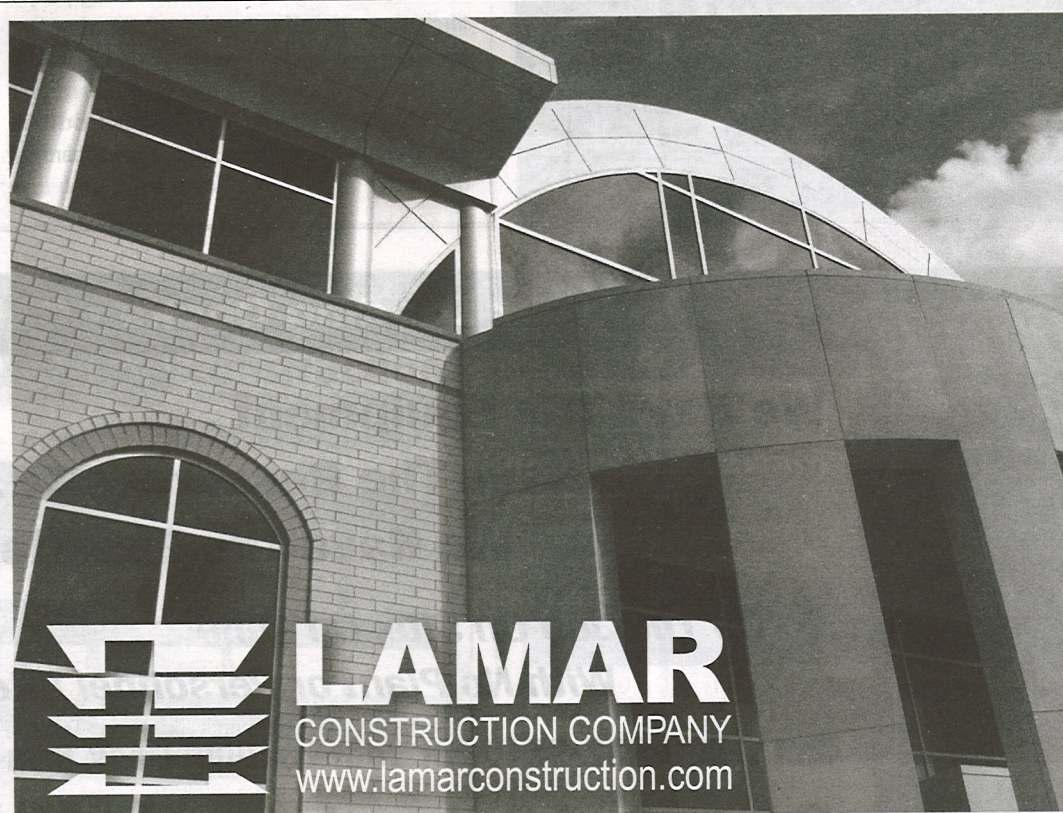
**Financing:** National City Bank

**Unit size:** Approximately 1,500 square feet, 2 bedrooms, and 2.5 baths

**Architect:** Jani Hart, Architecture + Design  
**Builder:** Southwest Builders, Inc.

"We have an active arts and industry council," she said. "We host a summer concert series, and we want to provide more entertainment."

Ultimately, she wants to provide more events on the riverbanks, and update some of the walkways there. Further into the future, the city may add more low-cost apartments and make use of some of the small "pocket parks" sprinkled throughout downtown. *MiBiz*



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