



Christening Lexington's Distillery District

"The redevelopment of the Manchester Street Distillery District will take a completely under-utilized area of the downtown and will put new life back into that area. It is amazing that the 30 acres of land in this area that is close to Rupp Arena and the Convention Center and the Central Business District has not been redeveloped. I am very excited about this project."

—Harold Tate, Downtown Development Authority

With historic roots that tie into Lexington's long-gone status as a bourbon producer a century ago (home to the Old Tarr Distillery and the James E. Pepper Distillery), Manchester street in west downtown has seen better days—today, it's primarily known as a convenient cut-through (off the Jefferson Street viaduct) if you need to go bail somebody out of jail. You'll pass weeds and warehouses along the way, and the current look is shabby-half-abandoned-industrial chic.

The "half-abandoned" aspect is also the key to its potential. Since the location hasn't been especially in-vogue for the past

began transforming tobacco warehouses into authentic, organic, and vital urban corridors.

While east-downtown real estate has become increasingly price-prohibitive in recent years, west downtown has remained a cluttered mix (gentrification preservationists and absentee slumlords have been duking it out in Woodward Heights for years, for example).

But for the optimistic at heart, west downtown is prime real estate—within easy walking distance of Rupp Arena (the Cox Street lot opens right onto Manchester Street), increased dining options, and affordable office space. For commercial

of development to occur in order to keep pace with other cities. It will be a great anchor to western downtown."

Barry McNees, a majority partner in developing the old distilleries, has gone on record with plans for the district that include a prospective home for arts, artists, lofts, coffeeshops, and maybe an eventual home to a farmers market.

The fantasy-on-record for every downtowner is, of course, A GROCERY STORE. (Anyone can see what disco Kroger on Euclid did for, and to, the Chevy Chase and Hollywood neighborhoods.)

When the Beaux Arts Ball opens its doors Saturday, it

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—Renee Jackson, Downtown Lexington Corporation

100 years, it also largely escaped the development bulldozers.

Instead of razing the old warehouses to make way for pre-fab urban lofts (a condo by any other name's still a condo), an opportunity exists that's closer in spirit to what the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Triangle managed when it

purposes, the neighborhood's also a quick and accessible drive to both the I-75 and I-64 corridors.

Renee Jackson, of the Downtown Lexington Corporation, says, "I am excited at the thought of having the distillery district come to fruition—Lexington needs this type

will christen Lexington's optimistic and ambitious "Distillery District" on Manchester Street.

The Old Tarr Distillery, at 899 Manchester Street, is home to this year's ball (followed the next week by a UK student's art exhibit opening on Friday April 13). ■