

Change is in the air on Lower Greenville

Hard-hit area hopes to reinvent its vibe

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In preparation for the grand re-opening of **Terilli's** restaurant later this month, Jeannie Terilli is calling on all the help she can get.

"We're having a priest come in to bless the place," said Terilli, the restaurant's owner. "I told him to be sure to sprinkle some holy water over the cash register."

The informal reopening of the restaurant last month was itself looked upon as a blessing by neighborhood supporters. (Although it began serving dinner again in early September, Terilli's will formally reopen Oct. 25.)

The March 2010 fire that destroyed Terilli's and several surrounding businesses was the latest link in a chain of problems plaguing Lower Greenville Avenue, which a generation ago was the hottest entertainment venue in Dallas.

Supporters believe many of those problems are turning around. Their goal, they said, is not to return the street to its glory days as a regional hot spot, but to reinvent it as a neighborhood amenity.

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The new model is not Uptown, but Lakewood Center.

"Lower Greenville was built to be a neighborhood venue, and it simply doesn't have the capacity to serve as a regional draw," said Dallas City Council

member Angela Hunt, whose district includes several Lower Greenville neighborhoods. "Undoubtedly, Lower Greenville will attract some visitors beyond East Dallas, but I think it functions best as primarily a neighborhood venue."

The district, defined as the stretch of Greenville Avenue from Mockingbird Lane south to Ross Avenue, began losing its regional cachet in the early 1990s.

It was superseded by other neighborhoods — first, Deep Ellum, and after Deep Ellum declined, by venues such as Uptown, Bishop Arts, Victory Park (for a while) and, most recently, Henderson Avenue.

The Terilli's fire was the second to harm the neighborhood. It was preceded by a blaze that leveled the Arcadia Theater in 2006.

Changing the 'vibe'

Meanwhile, Lowest Greenville, defined as the stretch south of Belmont Avenue, became increasingly plagued by violence, noise and intoxication generated by some late-night bars.

The city is attempting to revive Lowest Greenville through a two-pronged approach. Businesses there are now required

to get a permit to operate after midnight, which is considered a way to weed out those considered undesirable.

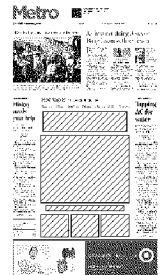
Several blocks of Lowest Greenville are being torn up for an extensive upgrade. The street will be narrowed from four lanes to two. The remake, scheduled for completion later this year, will also widen sidewalks and add bike racks, park benches, decorative streetlights and trees.

"We think the new streetscape will change the whole culture and vibe down here," said Marc Andres, who with his brother Roger owns property in the area. "Narrowing the street has a calming effect. It slows traffic down."

"We've always intended for this to be a neighborhood attraction," rather than a regional one, Roger Andres said. "We're looking for people in Lakewood who avoided us because of what was happening over the last few years, and passed us up for Uptown, to start coming back."

Supporters, too, are hoping to create opportunity from the site of the two fires.

The Terilli's reopening fills a gaping hole in the middle of Lower Greenville. Farther south, the former location of the Arcadia will be repurposed



as a court for food trucks, which urban designers consider among the most promising ideas for revitalizing city neighborhoods.

Back to its roots

Brent Brown, director of the City Design Studio, said developing Lower Greenville as a draw for surrounding neighborhoods merely re-creates its original function.

Many of its older buildings were built around streetcar stops, he noted.

“The scale of the buildings is very human. The doors are located every 40 feet on average to where a pedestrian can experience the street,” he notes.

The result, potentially, is to create a walkable center for nearby residents, a key goal for urban planners who would like to build a series of such areas around the city.

Greenville Avenue’s heyday 20 years ago is a source of mixed memories to residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. The popularity of the street’s attractions brought problems of parking and noise.

Council member Hunt believes such problems occurred because Lower Greenville was never intended to host the entire metropolitan area.

“Lower Greenville is a small retail strip surrounded by homes. ... When it became a regional draw in the ’80s and ’90s, it overwhelmed the neighborhoods and the infrastructure,” she said.

Finding ‘equilibrium’

Patricia Carr, president of Lower Greenville Neighborhood Association, said officials need to make sure the hoped-for revival keeps surrounding streets livable.

“The challenge is keeping an equilibrium — making the retail area viable, while protecting the quality of life,” she said.

The two goals may always be in tension.

Jeannie Terilli said she knew Lower Greenville was on the way to recovery when she turned off Mockingbird one evening a few weeks ago and saw a line of brake lights stretching down the street.

“The energy is back,” she said, “which means the traffic is back. The neighbors are complaining again, so we know we must be doing something right.”



Staff graphic



David Woo/Staff Photographer

Several blocks of Lowest Greenville are being torn apart for an extensive upgrade. "We think the new street-scape will change the whole culture and vibe down here," said property owner Marc Andres.



Photos by David Woo/Staff Photographer



Terilli's is back in business after a fire in March 2010 destroyed the building. The formal reopening of the restaurant will be Oct. 25.

Work is under way on Lower Greenville, where plans are to widen sidewalks and add bike racks, park benches, decorative streetlights and trees.