

DTH-02

NOTE: This is one of the few somewhat positive articles written; however, a separate and expanded story was warranted with the opening of "Locopops". Moreover, the statement that they are "doing just fine even with orange construction fencing just feet away from its front door" still supports the theme of "Lousy Landlord".

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West end maintains local flair with new changes

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The giant trees overlooking the west end of Franklin Street welcomed the rain, and even though it kept the number of pedestrians down, the rain didn't dampen the smiles of those indoors.

While sometimes overlooked in favor of the boisterous, high-rent happenings closer to campus, Franklin Street's west end enjoys a close-knit sense of community even while steadily changing.

"It's the stop you make when you come back in town," Uniquities stylist Meagan Griffin said.

She said the store sees a boom in sales during Homecoming, when many former residents return year after year for the boutique's trend-setting fashions.

"This year it's all about dresses," Griffin said smiling.

Robert Poitras, owner of the Carolina Brewery, helped start the West End Group, an organization made up of 27 west-end businesses that work together to promote the neighborhood.

"It's almost a microcosm of Soho, New York," Poitras said.

Poitras said the neighborhood's diversity increases the connectivity among businesses rather than competition.

Sharon Mujica, a librarian at the University, paused in front of Lantern, the award-winning restaurant, to rave between licks of her LocoPops about the array of dining opportunities.

"I always take students to 411," she said, pointing down the street to 411 West, the Italian restaurant.

Vanessa Neal, manager of Chapel Hill Comics, said her husband, owner Andrew Neal, moved the store to its location on West Franklin about two years ago and said the new spot is a great improvement from Rosemary Street, where the store was located before.

"This is starting to look like the sweet spot," Vanessa Neal said.

"We can try different things that we wouldn't have at the old place," she added, pointing out the Uglydolls that adorn the store's large front window.

Change is definitely a part of the area, as has been seen by Roger Tillison, owner of Great Cuts for 20 years.

Tillison said the area is catering to a different crowd these days.

"Students are staying more on the other end of town," he said about the changing demographics. "The west is getting more elaborate and expensive."

One recent addition, LocoPops, is making its home in the Courtyard building on West Franklin.

Owner Connie Semans said the store is in its second week but is doing just fine even with orange construction fencing just feet away from its front door.

Semans said she is excited about what the Courtyard will offer when completed.

Lousy Landlord

"It's going to be a real nice hangout spot," she said.

During the day, West Franklin's traffic is light enough that one can jaywalk at almost any point, and parking is easy to find.

Nighttime is a different story.

"Parking has always been a challenge," Poitras said.

To overcome the issue, the group worked with the town to implement free valet parking, available 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. Thursday through Saturday.

"That's just another way that we've been able to reach a solution by working together," he said.

The west end is noticeably devoid of chains, with the majority of the businesses being independently owned by local residents.

"We don't want to be exclusive; (the chains) haven't been that interested," Poitras said.

He said the group openly invites new businesses to join.

Jessica Larson, manager at Studio Supply, said she would like to see some more retail stores, preferably something with shoes.

Of course, she only needs to cross the street to Uniquities, which recently began selling shoes.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

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