

The Herald-Sun



Herald-Sun editorial: Downtown advocates reflect on progress, future

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DURHAM — The Downtown Durham Inc. annual meeting last week offered an opportunity to take a long look at how far the city's center has come.

When the organization was founded in 1993, downtown Durham was referred to as "moribund" by the media, according to Bill Kalkhof, Downtown Durham Inc. president.

Anyone who was around in those days no doubt knows what that description means. Little foot traffic, many vacancies, and not a whole lot positive going on.

Contrast that with the vibrant reality of downtown today, and it is not hard to see how far it has come.

The major news accompanying the Downtown Durham Inc. annual meeting last Wednesday is without a doubt bittersweet: Kalkhof, who has been president of the revitalization organization since its inception, will be retiring from his leadership position on April 30 of next year.

Kalkhof deserves a great deal of credit for being a galvanizing force behind the amazing progress that downtown Durham has made. He would be quick to say that he is obviously not the only advocate responsible – many, many people have contributed greatly to this collective effort – but his work has been crucially important.

"He'll be the first to tell you he wasn't the only one who made it happen, but the creation of DDI, and Bill Kalkhof's work, is a significant part of why Durham has been able to be as successful as it has in turning around the conditions in downtown," said Tom Bonfield, Durham city manager.

Undoubtedly, Kalkhof will remain involved in these efforts, and the city has a committed group of people working to improve and develop downtown.

His legacy is right there in front of us. The American Tobacco complex, West Village, the Durham Performing Arts Center, Durham Bulls Athletic Park – any one of these would be a signature, landmark project for a community of Durham's size. The fact that we can boast all of them is a remarkable set of achievements.

More work remains to be done. There are still pockets that need to be improved, infrastructure and transportation needs, and an economy that can be a drag on progress. But look at how far downtown has come. It's amazing.