

Big city vibe, but with a small town pace

Renovated living spaces in upper stories of historic buildings meld the old with the new

- By Joel Mills of the Tribune
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Living in downtown Lewiston is on its way from being the exception to being exceptional.

“I was like, there’s no way that’s in Lewiston,” Dakota White, 26, said of first laying his eyes on photos of the snazzy new apartments in the renovated building at 609 Main St. that formerly housed the Myklebust’s clothing store. “The second it became available, I jumped on it.”

April Proctor, 24, has lived just down the hallway from White for about a year. She grew up in Asotin and moved to Spokane for about a year for her job with Avista. But she missed small-town life and started looking for an apartment in the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley when a position opened in Clarkston.

Nothing seemed to fit her needs — until she came across 609 Main, that is.

“Everything is brand new and energy efficient, stainless steel appliances, luxury vinyl flooring, granite countertops, and the exposed brick gives a vintage yet luxury aesthetic,” Proctor said via email. “It feels as if my place was built specifically for me.”

People living downtown is nothing new. When Lewiston was founded, the area around the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater rivers had the flattest ground in the vicinity, attracting the town’s original settlements, which grew into its first businesses and homes.

The neighborhood surrounding Main Street boomed for decades. And it included some of Lewiston's grandest homes and plenty of other, smaller residential options like the apartments on the upper floors of several historic buildings.

But as the economic center of the city shifted toward 21st Street and Thain Road, the boom died down and most of the population migrated away, first to Normal Hill and then on to the city's other neighborhoods to the south and east.

That generations-long trend has reversed recently, if only a little. Property owners and economic development officials are welcoming a new generation of residents like Proctor and White who embrace urban living by building, promoting and attracting new residential spaces such as the renovated Myklebust's building.

"The view out my window includes aged brick buildings, streets, cars and different metal infrastructure, which gives you almost a 'New York City life' feel," Proctor said. "But on the other hand, there's green vegetation everywhere, the (Brackenbury) Square fountain running, never too much foot traffic and limited noise depending on the time of day, which gives you the 'small town' feel. It's the perfect mixture."

White is a senior assembler at Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories in Lewiston, but he moved here from Kendrick in 2012 to do radio and voiceover work. Locals might recognize his voice from the commercials that run before movies at Village Centre Cinemas. He's also a musician, and living in downtown Lewiston lends itself perfectly to his occasional side gig playing guitar and singing at Brock's bar just up the street in the Towne Square building at Fifth and Main streets.

He also gets his hair cut in the same building, at the Locker Room, and plays tabletop games like Dungeons and Dragons with his friends in the back of the convenience store across the street from his apartment.

And while the \$810 rent per month is a little steep for a studio, White said it is well worth it for the quality of construction and the quality of life surrounding his new home.

“I don’t care,” he said with a laugh when disclosing his rent. “I love this place.”

While the square footage is small, the space features sleek track lighting, slate gray kitchen cabinets and wall treatments, and composite countertops that mimic the look of granite. There are two floors of apartments in the building, and White lives on the top floor where the units also contain a loft. Proctor uses it as bonus space for things like her makeup table, while White placed a bed in his.

“It’s very simple,” White said of the space and its high-end finishes. “That’s why I like it. But it still looks good and it’s easy to clean.”

The building’s ground-floor retail space has been vacant since it opened, however, a possible sign that the redevelopment of downtown will happen incrementally. White said he’d like to see a bar open there so he wouldn’t have to go far for a snort of his beverage of choice, Pendleton whiskey.

And Proctor said she would like to see better parking options downtown and more promotion of downtown events to bring even more life to her neighborhood. But it already offers all she needs to lead a happy existence.

“Being in the hub of downtown is so convenient because I can walk to shops, restaurants, bars and, my favorite, the Fourth Wall (art studio) for paint and wine nights,” she said. “But then I can drive across the blue bridge and be to work in five minutes.”

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