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Written by: Staff

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Howard Square welcome addition to downtown

The new Howard Square is a winning situation all around.

A few short years ago, most Muncie residents would not have wandered into the area of southeast downtown between Charles street and the railroad and Jefferson and Elm streets during the day, let alone after dark. Abandoned and dilapidated homes and apartment buildings were an eyesore and a haven for vermin like rats and roaches; they drew drug users and drug dealers and others down on their luck or up to no good.

But Flaherty & Collins Properties, developers of the adjacent Millennium Place neighborhood, and the city of Muncie had the vision to see what a rose the long-blighted thorn of a neighborhood could become for downtown in particular and Muncie in general. And what a rose it is with:

- Thirty units of affordable housing for seniors (including 15 one-bedroom and nine two-bedroom units, in a newly constructed building.
- Six two-bedroom units in two renovated historic brick buildings.
- A community room, computer center, security cameras, individual porches, central air, washer-dryer connections, ceiling fans and cable connections.

The \$3.6 million, townhouse-style development also adds an important dimension, namely seniors, to Muncie's revitalized downtown, which has tended to be an enclave of the young and the yuppies.

Neighborhoods used to be multi-generational. Families with young children lived side-by-side with middle-aged empty nesters and elderly pensioners. It was a mix where people supported, cared for and looked out for one another and learned to appreciate and respect all ages.

In the 1960s and '70s, the trend in senior housing was to build cold, fortress-like high-rise buildings that did not fit the surrounding neighborhoods and did not encourage residents to feel like part of the community. More recently, many seniors have flocked to gated communities that have plenty of services and amenities geared specifically for them, but can be isolating in their pastoral serenity.

Howard Square provides a wonderful alternative for those who want a more urban lifestyle within walking distance of recreational facilities like the YWCA and the YMCA, a variety of restaurants and coffee bars, the Muncie Public Library and its genealogy center, opportunities for volunteer work like the Muncie Children's Museum and nearby day-care centers and the chance to interact with all ages at downtown events like Friday night movies and Rib Fest.

It is a welcome addition to the continuing revitalization of downtown as the city center and as a neighborhood, and speaks volumes about the foresight of city leaders and the power of public-private partnerships in the continuing revitalization and development of Muncie.