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## NEWS *Release*

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### **URBAN LIVING TOUR** **to Showcase Rockford's Downtown Living Opportunities** (by Pam Hein, River District Association Board Secretary)

**Rockford, IL** -- On Saturday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, the River District Association will host its second annual Urban Living Tour. Last year's event brought hundreds of people downtown and organizers hope this year's tour will attract even more. Tourists will be able to visit sites anytime between the hours of 11am and 4pm. Tickets are now on sale, and can be purchased for \$12 in advance. They will be \$15 the day of the tour. Contact the River District Association office at 815-964-6221 for more information. ***Advance tickets*** on sale at the River District office, Just Goods, 201 7th St., and 5SPA, 508 E. State St. ***Day of event tickets sold at:*** 228 S. Main St.(William Brown Lofts) and 201 7th St. (Just Goods). **Non-refundable**

This year's tour stretches beyond the River District boundaries and will include projects from adjacent downtown neighborhoods, as well as properties located in the heart of the District. The selection of sites include a single family home in the Churchill's Grove neighborhood, several upper-story redevelopment projects, examples of loft-style living, unique artist's studios, and even one of Rockford's premier high-rise apartments. The tour will give visitors a chance to see several projects in the construction and remodeling phases. Organizers hope that the tour will not only showcase some of the unique living options downtown, but also promote some of the more traditional historic neighborhoods which border the River District. Two of this year's sites are located in the Midtown District, the business district directly southeast of downtown.

The Urban Living Tour is just one initiative by the River District Association to promote downtown living. Others include the collection of rental and sales data of downtown housing, and gathering the names of people interested in moving to the downtown area. This year's tourists will have an opportunity to see several new projects, remodels and vacant units and indicate their interest in renting or purchasing.

Increasing living opportunities in the heart of downtown and promoting the historic neighborhoods surrounding downtown have been important priorities for the Association over the past several years. Throughout the years, researchers have sought to identify common elements found in successful and vibrant downtowns. A number of studies have identified a strong downtown housing market as one of the key components for revitalization. Although there does not seem to be a singular formula for success, researchers have concluded that thriving downtowns include strong adjacent residential neighborhoods within walking distance, the presence of mixed-use development within the downtown area, and the use of historic preservation to help forge a special identity.

Retail, beautification, and public amenities are also key components for successful downtowns, and certainly add to the desirability of having a downtown address. The River District Association is committed to promoting these aspects as well. The Urban Living Tour, like many other downtown events, gives residents an opportunity to shop the stores and eat in the restaurants in the downtown area. Many new establishments have opened in the past couple of years and tour patrons are encouraged to shop and eat while in the area. Plan to make a day of it!

### **Upstairs Downtown leads to local Downtown Developer's Guide**

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There are thousands of buildings in America's older downtowns with vacant upper floors. In Illinois alone, it is estimated that over 40,000 downtown buildings have upper floors that have sat vacant or underused for over 30 years. Many of these buildings are in mid-size and smaller communities. These spaces have a central location, high visibility, complete community infrastructure, and are prime candidates for redevelopment. In an effort to help communities combat the under-utilization of upper floors in historic downtown buildings, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) developed a program entitled *Upstairs Downtown*.

The IHPA will hold a workshop on Friday, September 7, 2007 with downstate's Alton Marketplace to present the *Upstairs Downtown* program. Information about the workshop can be found at [www.upstairsdowntown.org](http://www.upstairsdowntown.org). The workshop addresses the economic, design, code, environmental, accessibility, marketing, management, insurance, and financing challenges entailed in bringing these historic buildings' commercial upper floors back into full reuse. The presentations are augmented by real case studies demonstrating successful upper floor rehabilitations, showcasing both large and small budgets, and a variety of uses, and are usually accompanied by a walking tour of upper floor rehabs.

On the local front, the River District has developed a book to help those interested in redevelopment of downtown historic buildings. The book is entitled *The Downtown Developer's Guide* and addresses some of the same issues. The book will soon serve as a model for other Illinois communities in the Main Street organization. The *Downtown Developer's Guide* is \$35, and will be available for purchase at the Urban Living Tour.

## Urban Living Tour Site List

### West of Rock River

**228 S. Main St.** - William Brown Lofts (loft apartment for rent in historic building) **Ticket sales location day of event.**

**128 N. Church St.** - Church St. Properties (office & apartment in historic building)

**534 & 540 N. Court St.** - North Court Co-op (artist studios/residences/galleries, one for rent)

**913 N. Main St.** - Rock River Tower Apartments (beautifully decorated 2BR with fantastic view)

**206 Franklin Place** - Single Family Historic Home (for sale)

### East of Rock River

**201 7th St.** - 2nd Story apartments above Just Goods Fair Trade Market (finished & unfinished) **Ticket sales location day of event.**

**502 7th St.** - Lantow Lofts (Condos under construction)

**508 E. State St.** - 2nd Story apartment above 5SPA (under construction)

**219 E. State St.** - 2nd story apartment above Runner's Image