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A renovated residence is situated behind a fence on Clay Street in the Lone Star neighborhood.

Lone Star neighborhood

A humble throwback

Multifamily developments to boost diversity in artsy area.

BY VALENTINO LUCIO

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When looking for a home, people usually stay away from the “other side” of the tracks. But for people looking to live near downtown, it’s worth taking the leap over the rails.

Situated in the shadows of the King William and Lavaca historic districts, the Lone Star neighborhood is a humble throwback, a community filled with vibrant promise and cheap real estate. Many houses were built in the 1920s, but the area lacks the historical designation of its northern neighbors.

Without definite boundaries set for the community, former neighborhood association members said it’s framed by South Alamo Street to the north, Probandt Street to the east, U.S. 90 to the south and Interstate 35 to the west.

Despite the absence of mansions and riverfront properties, the old industrial neighborhood takes pride in its past and is optimistic about what’s to come.

“It’s easy to imagine that about 1,000 more people will be living in this



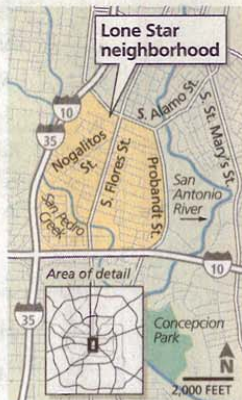
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Cevallos Street is known for some of its unusually shaped residential rental spaces.



COURTESY OF ALAMO ARCHITECTS

This is a rendering of how the four-story, 252-unit Cevallos Street Lofts at 301 East Cevallos St. will look when the rental property is completed in spring 2011.



EXPRESS-NEWS GRAPHIC

area in the near future,” said Irby Hightower, principal with Alamo Architects. “San Antonio is about slow, steady change. But one of the nice things about this neighborhood is that it’s changing pretty quickly.”

Alamo Architects,

which moved to the neighborhood in 2007, has designed several buildings in San Antonio and some of the new developments expected in the neighborhood. One anticipated property is the Cevallos Street Lofts at 301 East Cevallos. Construction

started this year and is expected to be completed by spring 2011. The four-story, 252-unit rental property will offer residents several amenities including a pool, Internet cafe, underground parking and

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DIVERSITY

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a landscaped courtyard. Units will range in size from 600-square-foot efficiencies to two-story, 1,330-square-foot lofts. It will be a mixed-income property, offering both high-end and affordable spaces, ranging from \$400 to \$1,500.

About two blocks north, the Steel House Lofts will add to the lively residential resurgence happening along South Flores Street, a part of the Lone Star neighborhood that's also known as SoFlo. Funding issues stalled the project but Dennis McDaniel, the property's owner, said he expects to close on a loan before the end of the year and anticipates construction should be complete before 2012.

Both properties will be constructed to meet various sustainable building standards, appealing to a wide range of environmentally conscious renters.

Situated in an old iron and steel warehouse, the four-story Steel House Lofts will have 67 rental units, ranging from 640 to 1,822 square feet. Apartments will be priced from \$700 to \$1,900 and many units will have balconies and backyards. With a pool and gym on site, the property also will have two commercial fronts, one expected to be a café and the other utilized as office space.

The influx of new adaptable reuse projects aims at revitalizing and bringing diversity to an area that, for some residents, has always been neglected.

"We're working-class families, and we've always been ignored down here," said Joe Salazar, who grew up in the area and recently moved back to retire. "But with all the development, it's bringing the area back to life. It hard to say how much development will take place in the next five years, but I think great things will happen. People you normally wouldn't see down here are now calling this neighborhood home."

Mike Lackey, who operates a mechanical engineering firm downtown, plans to move back into the neighborhood where he spent time growing up. About a year ago, Lackey purchased a dilapidated home across the street from the Cevallos Street Lofts location, and plans to remodel and convert it into a live/work space. His fond memories of visiting his grandmother as a kid and his craving for the urban lifestyle, he said, directed his decision to invest in the area.

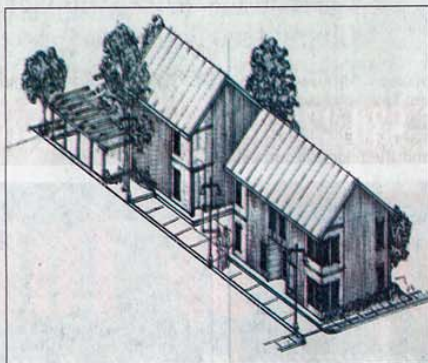
"You can say I'm going back to my roots," he said. "It's an area in transformation. But I chose this area because I wanted more of the urban experience."

Salazar has lived in the area for two years and takes pride in maintaining his one-story home. Several older houses on his block boast manicured lawns, while other fully renovated homes have xeriscaped yards. Despite the rundown homes and vacant lots still sprinkled throughout the area, Salazar admits that the neighborhood has outgrown its "wrong-side-of-the-tracks" image.



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Owner Mike Lackey plans to renovate and transform his property at 232 Cevallos St. into a live/work space.



COURTESY ILLUSTRATION

Mike Lackey purchased the house at 232 Cevallos Street about a year ago. This is a rendering of what the house will look like after the renovation.

"This area had a reputation for crime," he said. "But times change and things have changed here. Police are always patrolling the streets. It's quiet. There are a lot of families that keep to themselves, but we still look out for each other."

Lorie Campos with

Downtown Dwellings, a local company focused on promoting urban living, agrees that increased diversity will continue to turn around the neighborhood.

"If you take a snapshot of the area, it's really diverse," Campos said. "And in five years, it'll be even more diverse. Right now

there are a lot of early adopters. There's definitely energy here."

The artsy buzz that exists in Southtown has trickled into the SoFlo district, with about half-a-dozen art galleries scattered along S. Flores. Monthly events like Second Saturday aim at highlighting local artists, adding to the artistic flare the neighborhood is developing.

Restaurant and entertainment staples like La Tuna Grill and the Pedicab Bar and Grill draw an eclectic mix of people looking for a satisfying meal, cold beer, live music and a good time.

But probably the most important detail is that home prices are substantially lower there than its historical neighbors to the north. Many comparable homes are listed for nearly 40 percent less, making a purchase and investment for the future.

"It's worth a look," Campos said. "You definitely get more for your money down here."