

Changes advance Elk City restoration

By Elaina Sauber
Staff writer

If it doesn't look like Elk City's revival has progressed over the past year, you're probably not looking hard enough.

The arrival of Kin Ship Goods and Base Camp Printing last year brought summer block parties and live music to Washington Street West and Tennessee Avenue.

A new mural now adorns another of the historic district's buildings, depicting its namesake.

Vacancy rates in the neighborhood are slowly dropping, down to approximately 19 percent from 22 percent last year, according to Charleston Main Streets Executive Director Ric Cavender.

The newest retailer, Elk City Records, next to Bully Trap Barbershop, will open in the near future.

But it was developer Tighe Bullock's purchase of the former Staats Hospital in 2014, a striking, four-story brick building in the heart of the neighborhood, that really set in motion Elk City's slow but steady transformation over the past few years.

Bullock, who has bought and renovated a handful of buildings in Elk City with help from financial institutions and the Charleston Urban Renewal Authority, said the Staats Building is nearing the end of "Phase Zero."

The goal to stabilize the building for future tenants came with five components: A new roof, new windows, rehatted storefront, asbestos abatement and general cleanup of the building.

The new roof was a crucial component because of the water damage to the building. Its downspouts were stolen for scrap metal, which caused water to run into the building for extended periods.

The only task that remains, Bullock said, is replacing the building's 93 windows.

With a grant for \$35,000 from West Virginia's State Historic Preservation Office, that's the next step.

"It's a dollar for dollar match, so we have to spend \$70,000 on the windows," he said.

Bullock is pursuing both federal and state historic rehabilitation tax credits for the building, which offer a combined 30 percent in income tax credits once the structure is in service.

The Tamarack Foundation for the Arts announced a capital campaign last year to raise \$100,000 in order to create a "creative business incubator" in the Staats building, but it ran into a few hiccups when CURA denied a request for funds and Executive Director Alissa Novoselick announced she was leaving the foundation late last year.

But Bullock isn't hampered by the hurdles; it gives him more time to wrap up some other projects he's working on in Elk City — many of which are residential.

He's renovated one house in the 700 block of Indiana Avenue, and is completing roughly



CHRIS DORST | Gazette-Mail photos

The Kin Ship Goods store on Tennessee Avenue in the Elk City neighborhood on Charleston's West Side.



The new Elk City mural on Tennessee Avenue.



The Elk City Records store on West Washington Street is not yet open.

a dozen apartment units around the neighborhood.

Bullock is a major proponent of mixed-use buildings. Many of the apartments are on the upper floors of buildings that house businesses like Kin Ship Goods and Bully Trap.

"I think it's an important part of building community, that people can live in the same area they're working in. It kind of fosters a sense of community," Bullock said.

Bullock's most recent purchase in Elk City was last month, when he closed on 222 Washington St. West, which formerly housed a Dollar General on the neighborhood's main thoroughfare, for \$185,000.

If his vision for that building follows through, it could be a game changer for the district.

Bullock said he's been in "really preliminary" talks with West Virginia Public Broadcasting and Mountain Stage about

a possible partnership in the building. It would give visiting musicians an option to come into Charleston a day early and play an extra show before Mountain Stage on Sundays.

"People could have a drink and dance to the bands they like, then see them the next day at Mountain Stage," Bullock said.

Such a venture would likely call for a restaurant in that space as well, he said.

The Gazette-Mail reported in May that Bullock was in early talks with Lewis Rhinehart, owner of Fayetteville-based Secret Sandwich Society, about opening a second location in Elk City.

While those plans haven't yet moved forward, Bullock said he still has his eye on Secret Sandwich Society as a potential future tenant in 222 Washington St. West.

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F. BRIAN FERGUSON | Gazette-Mail

A worker puts finishing touches on the sign for the new Pioneer Federal Credit Union, in the 1300 block of Kanawha Boulevard.

Pioneer Federal Credit Union headquarters nears completion

By Erin Beck
Staff writer

Pioneer Federal Credit Union's new corporate headquarters on Kanawha Boulevard is expected to open later this month, with an open house planned for spring, according to the CEO.

Dan McGowan, of Pioneer Federal Credit Union, said earlier this month that the new location was mostly complete by Feb. 13, with an official opening expected late in February.

"We're really tickled about it," he said.

If all goes well, an open house would be planned for late April or early May, he said.

"It's mostly just going to be a really good, solid, functioning office building," he said. It will be filled with natural light, he said.

"We want this thing to be pleasant for everyone," McGowan said.

The company wanted to erect a new office building because it had outgrown the previous location, next door.

"Fortunately we were able to do that right next door," he said.

The credit union is located at 1320 Kanawha Blvd. E. Riverview Presbyterian Church sold its building and land, at 1316 Kanawha Blvd. E., to the credit union for \$1.1 million in 2014.

The credit union announced in February 2015 that construction would begin the next year. The church was demolished.

Workers were completing landscaping and planning to install a waterfall fountain outside earlier this month.

The construction is the first time in the company's 77-year

history that it has built a corporate headquarters from the ground up.

The credit union started with 10 school teachers. Now it has 17,000 members in 10 counties, McGowan said.

It started with \$75. Now the credit union has nearly \$200 million in assets, he said.

"Isn't that amazing?" he said. "We really are a great local Charleston success story."

He said it had record earnings the past two years.

The former building is up for sale.

"Hopefully, they'll be someone in Charleston that would really value some nice, prime Kanawha frontage property here," McGowan said.

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