

Schuchard brings art loft track record to city Loop

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Patrick Schuchard has his sights on redeveloping the area north of the Loop.

Last week, Schuchard purchased twin one-story buildings at 870 Hodiamont Ave., two blocks north of the Pageant theater.

Schuchard, the E. Desmond Lee Professor for Community Collaboration at Washington University's School of Art, plans to turn all 6,000 square feet into artists' studios, with one being his own.

Schuchard would not say how much he paid for the Hodiamont Avenue properties, but according to the city of St. Louis Assessor's Office, the buildings are assessed at \$15,400, which is typically about one-third of the market value. He estimates it will cost about \$200,000 to develop the buildings.

It was not just the buildings that attracted Schuchard to the neighborhood, which, he admits, is in poor condition. Schuchard has been invested in the area for some time now.

In 1999 he worked on the master plan for that area, and he served on the design team to redevelop the streets around the "East Loop."

With his purchase, Schuchard hopes to create a wave of neighborhood improvements. "That's inadvertently going to happen, because I'm going to fix (the buildings) up. I've been looking for studio space for myself, and these buildings are really interesting."

The buildings date back to the 1920s and boast 15-foot ceilings and open layouts, Schuchard said. Formerly the buildings were home to an air conditioning contractor and a roofing business.

Joe Edwards, who redeveloped the Pageant theater and owns several businesses in the Loop, including Blueberry Hill Restaurant and Bar, had not heard of Schuchard's building purchase on Hodiamont but said he approved of the move and would welcome his new neighbor to the area.

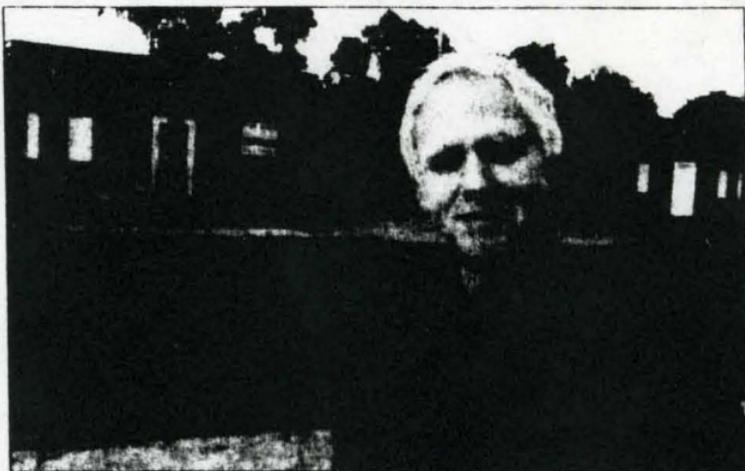
"I think it's wonderful," Edwards said of Schuchard's purchase. "Those (buildings) would make great studios."

Schuchard's confidence in the project stems from previous experience. More than just an artist, Schuchard has a track record in the rehab business and has participated in several downtown revitalization projects across the nation. Currently, he is working in Owensborough, Ky., where, along with Desmond Lee, he is

designing a one-third-mile river wall along the Ohio River to create more of a river front for that downtown area.

In 1998 he coordinated the renovation of a 1907 warehouse on Washington Avenue into artists' lofts and an art gallery, pioneering the way for the current downtown loft trend.

In 1997 Schuchard approached his employer, Washington University, which owned a warehouse building at 1627 Washington Ave. Schuchard proposed that he remodel it into artists' lofts. His purpose,



Patrick Schuchard plans to spend \$200,000 renovating two buildings in the East Loop into artists studios.

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he said, was to stop the "brain drain" from St. Louis by offering some of the lofts at lower rents for recent art graduates.

Schuchard got the university administration's blessing on the idea, and he teamed up with Regional Housing and Community Development Alliance, which applied for tax credits to pay for the rehab.

It took years to get the credits, but eventually all 64,000 square feet of the building were redone into 26 rental units, 10 of which are market rate, renting for \$1,100 to \$1,500 a month. The rest are reserved for young artists who qualify for low-income housing and rent for as low as \$380 a month. There is office space in the building, as well as a first-floor art gallery and coffee shop. The project cost nearly \$6 million.

Washington University graduate and artist Phillip Slein is one of those benefiting from Schuchard's idea. Slein said if it weren't for the affordability of his apartment in the refurbished University Lofts (he pays just \$550 a month), he wouldn't be able to run his art gallery downtown.

He calls University Lofts, "the house that Schuchard built." All the apartments are equipped with Internet connections, washers and dryers, and full kitchens.

Because of Schuchard's vision, people are coming downtown again, Slein said, adding that an art opening in the Des Lee Gallery typically attracts 500 people, which helps the restaurants on Washington Avenue.

Schuchard said he plans to get started on his new project on Hodiamont Avenue as soon as possible. He already has hired the contractors, including Maplewood Plumbing and Eagle Roofing.