

The following article on the front page of The Hartford Courant ([www.ctnow.com](http://www.ctnow.com)) gives further evidence of New Haven's renaissance!

## **Young Find New Haven**

### **Small-Scale Approach To Urban Revitalization Creates A New Vibrancy**

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By TARA WEISS, Courant Staff Writer

NEW HAVEN -- Eamonn Edge knew he wanted to move to a new city after graduating from college a few years ago. The challenge was finding one that could provide enough urban life to keep him entertained and still be manageable.

Edge found what he wanted in New Haven.

"New York City would have been crazy," says Edge, now a 27-year-old graphic designer in Yale University's development office. "[New York's] a nice place to visit, but I don't think I want to live there. I had heard good things about New Haven. It's been a nice step from college."

Edge arrived just in time. In the past three years, New Haven's downtown has experienced an influx of 20- and 30-somethings that is bringing new life and vibrancy to the city. As more singletons and young marrieds appear, so do the restored apartments, sleek and funky bars, restaurants, coffee shops and boutiques they crave. And it's a go-to place for nightlife.

"It feeds off itself," says Roland Lemar, press secretary for Mayor John DeStefano Jr. and one of the city's 20-something residents. "When you see 100 or 200 more young people walking around the city during the day, it becomes a more attractive place to locate."

Ask a native or a businessperson and each offers a different explanation for why New Haven has succeeded in revitalizing its downtown while so many other Connecticut cities haven't. There is Yale University, a major downtown employer and a driving force behind the tech companies that bring young professionals and their spending money. There are the restaurants and clubs that pop up to serve them. There are the arts organizations that are flourishing, partly because the city is investing in them and partly because they're working together. There is the improved image and lowered crime rate. And there is the accessibility and proximity to New York City.

Whatever the causes, the effects are clear.

A burst of revitalization in the neighborhoods surrounding the New Haven green has turned pedestrian walkways into an obstacle course of scaffolding and construction equipment. Since 2001, about 900 residential units have been created or are planned, and are being filled mostly by young professionals, Lemar says.

Much of the renovation is happening in former industrial and office buildings, making for

apartments with picture windows and high ceilings. Price-wise, they run the gamut. The toniest of them can be nearly \$3,000 for a two-bedroom, rates previously unheard of downtown. Studios in some buildings such as the Strouse, Adler (the former girdle factory) are about \$790 per month.

The floors above the Chapel Square Mall are being converted to upscale and market-rate apartments with retail stores on the ground floor. So far Restoration Hardware and Anne Taylor Loft have signed leases. The former SNET building was converted to 140 upscale, art deco-type apartments, complete with hardwood floors, cherry cabinets, granite counter tops, cast-iron bathtubs, 10-foot-high ceilings and a washer and dryer in every apartment.

A five-screen art house theater is scheduled to open at 80 Temple St. (the former United Illuminating Building) next autumn. Forty-four rental apartments will be above the theater, with a bar and a restaurant next to it.

"When I was here during college there was nothing happening entertainment-wise down Temple Street - it was boarded up," says Reginald Solomon, a 1998 Yale graduate who moved back from the San Francisco area about a year ago. "They've transformed things. Even the landscaping of the city looks different."

Like Edge, Solomon wanted to live where he could walk to meet friends instead of driving, and he wanted plenty of entertainment options. His Mansfield Street apartment is ideal for walking downtown. And he's getting more for his money here. He shares a two-bedroom, 1,700-square-foot apartment for \$1,000 per month, compared with a small three-bedroom that was nearly \$3,000 per month in the Bay area.

Solomon no longer worries about being dependent on his car.

"The weekend [a month ago] that it snowed I was supposed to meet a friend for drinks," says Solomon, a 28-year-old program director for Yale's office of New Haven and state affairs. "By 5 p.m. the snow was really bad. She called and asked if I still want to go out. I said, 'Why not?' We both live downtown. We went to Delmonaco and then we walked into Roomba and had mojitos. There were lots of other young people there too. When you live here you don't have to worry about the weather. You can get home without having to get on the highway. I can roll out of bed and be at the green or Starbucks."

It was only a few years ago that Solomon and fellow Yale graduates wouldn't consider staying in New Haven. Now, within walking distance of the New Haven Green, there are places like The Playwright, an Irish pub (although its decor is rather medieval). A few doors down is the sleekly designed Neat Lounge, a martini bar. Walk around the corner and there's the Sci-Fi Cafe, with drinks that sound as if they're from outer space.

With Yale's population of undergraduate and graduate students, there was always a need for cheap eats, bars and coffee shops. But the city couldn't retain the students once graduation came. And many establishments dreaded holidays and summer break when

students left town. Businesses played musical chairs.

### Investing In Inventors

To help build a more stable business climate, Yale started investing in its professors' discoveries by helping create lab space at Science Park (the former Winchester Arms Co. complex) and at 300 George St. about five years ago. They're also helping to connect those companies with venture capital and helping them get patents and licenses.

"We're working to help them take discoveries from the lab to the bedside and commercialize them," says Michael Morand, Yale's associate vice president for New Haven and state affairs. "Yale can only be as good as it can be if New Haven is as good as it can be."

Those startups are attracting singles and newly marrieds in droves. Cyrus Karkaria isn't a 20-something, but he is single and wants to live in a city that doesn't shut down when it gets dark. He had to consider the urban life he'd leave behind in Cambridge, Mass., when he was offered a job as a scientist at the New Haven-based biotech company CuraGen.

"I came here a couple times before I took the job and found there are plenty of things I could do," says Karkaria, 42, who moved here about a month ago. "It's on a much smaller scale but it is city life. I haven't been disappointed."

He's within walking distance of many city theaters and museums, which are also experiencing a resurgence.

### Town, Gown And Arts

With the Shubert Theater, Yale's many museums and theaters and the city's reputation for producing renowned architects, New Haven has always had a vibrant arts community. Still, in the late '90s, New Haven's International Festival of Arts and Ideas and the Jazz Festival, both signature city events, were floundering. So the university and the business community contributed money to the festivals and leased office space for a reduced price.

The result was astounding. Both attract almost 40,000 people to the Green over the course of the festivals. That's just the start of the season; there are concerts and events held on the green each Saturday night throughout the summer.

"Sometimes we hold our breath because we'll get 25,000 people for a salsa concert," says Susan Godshall, senior vice president at the chamber of commerce.

To build on that energy, the arts council two years ago created Art Spot, a networking group for area professionals under 35. It rotates events through venues in the city. Some months, up to 175 people attend.

That's partly because people feel more comfortable walking around downtown. Lowering

the crime rate (homicides have declined from 35 in 1990 to seven last year), and then overcoming the city's dangerous image was integral. To do that, the Town Green Special Services District was created in the late '90s to remove graffiti and spruce up downtown areas. There are also "hospitality officers" who "keep an eye on the street."

One area the city struggled to reinvigorate was Ninth Square, the neighborhood next to the New Haven Coliseum. The efforts have proven worthwhile. Buildings that went for \$200,000 in 9th Square last year are now selling for three to five times that amount.

"For the past two years there have been people scouring every inch of downtown New Haven looking for spaces they can fill with business and apartments," says Richard Guralnick, a senior broker for H. Pearce Real Estate Co. "A year ago no one would have thought to come [to Ninth Square]. Now there's a place like the Central Steakhouse, decorated with mahogany paneling on the outside. I have developers from New York City who have heard enough and seen enough that New Haven has gotten over the hump. It's no longer a risk."

Hundreds of market rate (and subsidized) apartments have been refurbished in historic buildings there. Walking around that neighborhood, Guralnick points to restaurants like Fat Cat's Cafe, Miso and architect's studios that a few years ago were boarded-up urban blights. First lady Laura Bush and her daughter Barbara, a Yale student, have been spotted in the neighborhood's Malaysian restaurant, Bentara.

#### More Hours, More Business

To increase foot traffic and cater to those who work later than 5 p.m., Yale now requires all of its nearly 70 tenants to stay open until 9 p.m. Restaurants must stay open till 11 p.m. during the week. They've also brought a new mix of tenants in - combining national chains such as J. Crew, Urban Outfitters and Au Bon Pain with family-owned businesses such as Gourmet Heaven and Cutler's Records, Tapes & CDs.

Not everybody is happy about the strict lease, and the new regulations have caused some controversy - particularly a 70 percent rent increase for some stores. A handful of businesses could not comply, such as the family-owned shoe store Barrie Ltd., and have gone out of business.

Also being considered is a move for the Long Wharf Theatre from its remote location off I-95 to the site of the soon-to-be-demolished Coliseum. That would bring even more life to Ninth Square. Gateway Community College is also considering a move to the long vacant Macy's building on the edge of Ninth Square.

"My friends are beginning to realize this is a great place to buy," says Solomon. "If one moves here, another moves here. Having the university means a lot of people come through this place. I like that the world comes to me. And I have the luxury of being in a place that's really affordable."

That may not last long. As a city gains in popularity, real estate prices soar.

"I've made four offers on condos between March and October, and because the market is so hot, everybody wants to buy," says Solomon. "I'm trying to buy in before the secret is out."