

Best thing to happen to business in the past year

East Village

People involved with the vision for the East Village district on the east side of downtown Des Moines get goosebumps just talking about it.

Thom Guzman, Historic East Village Inc. board member, says so many projects are taking off or making their home in the district that "it's created an energy of its own."

It wasn't that long ago, he says, that the "study district," the buildings on East Locust and East Fifth streets, were close to being torn down and lost forever. The argument was made that the buildings contributed to the pedestrian-friendly environment. Now, businesses such as the Kitchen Collage and Gong Fu Tea occupy the space, just two of many success stories to report, Guzman said. The way that the city of Des Moines has stepped in to support the effort has also made a big impact, he said.

"The city was a big player in the streetscape and developing design guidelines for the historic buildings, as well as financial incentives," Guzman said. "I've worked in this area for 17 years, and it's so exciting to see people come together and say let's make this the best place it can be."

Kit Curran, president of Historic East Village Inc., agrees that the collaborative effort has made all the difference in the East Village's development.

"The thing that I am so proud of is the fact that the residents, the businesses and organizations show a real shared passion for this area and want to make it a vibrant area for people to come to and enjoy themselves."

RUNNERS-UP: Securing Wells Fargo for West Des Moines and Des Moines; housing in downtown Des Moines.