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There's a whole lot of 'good' going on in Wood River's downtown

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Work was progressing in mid-February on renovations to one of Wood River's iconic downtown merchant locations. Cleary's Shoes & Boots, at 48 E. Ferguson Ave., remains open as the company's reinvestment into the city's downtown takes shape, reinforcing their commitment to the local economy and their part in continued community progress. (Photo by Melissa Crockett Meske/Illinois Business Journal)

Downtown Wood River continues to emerge with a renaissance made much more visible over this past year, following a period of decline in years prior. Some might chalk it up to a pandemic and post-pandemic phenomena. But for one developer, it is all a united community effort of "bringing the good back to downtown Wood River."

Developer Tim O'Donnell with TJO Holdings recently took the Illinois Business Journal on a walking tour of downtown for an up-close look at all that is happening to revive the city from its decline over the past years. O'Donnell, with years of experience in bringing cities back to life including Highland and Maplewood, Mo., is involved in several of the Wood River redevelopment projects and working with city officials and the community network to bring more new business, and visitors, to town.

"The credit for what's happening downtown, and throughout all of Wood River, really needs to go to Mayor Tom Stalcup, City Manager Steve Palen, Police Chief Brad Wells, and all of the city's leaders for having a dedicated vision for the city that they are passionate about moving forward," said O'Donnell. "This is the fifth downtown that we've helped redevelop, and we're staying invested because of all the city has done to help us come to town and grow."

O'Donnell works with Green Tree Home Solutions, one of the newest businesses to locate in Wood River's downtown. Formerly housed in Edwardsville, Green Tree moved into the former Perica Law Office location at 229 E. Ferguson Ave. in January 2023. O'Donnell shared that this move brought with it around $2.2 million in economic impact to the city.

"I met with the mayor, the city manager, and the police chief, and they were very serious about bringing change to Wood River," said Green Tree Home Solutions Owner Dan Werner. "I liked the way things were going, and I was expecting we would become involved in a lot of the work being done, so I thought, why not buy a building and move the main office to the city?

"I think it's going to be a great move for us, and I can't wait to see what the future has to hold. It is absolutely amazing to see all the visions that all the different people have, and in five years, you're going to see a huge difference in that downtown area," Werner added.

"This location is giving Green Tree better access to the region it serves by being here, and with a greater return on investment," O'Donnell said.

And as he showed off the renovations happening inside the former law office, O'Donnell pointed out many upgraded and new amenities, including its dozen office spaces, two conference rooms, and six bathrooms. "About $225,000 in building improvements so far," O'Donnell noted, "including significant tech upgrades."

In the building that once housed the local VFW post, its original full bar still occupies the lower level, complete with its open D-curved glass block design. "We plan to keep it as historically intact as we can, and we are calling it 'The Post' in honor of its former keepers," O'Donnell said as he shared some of the memorabilia that has been discovered during renovations.

Sharing space in the renovated Green Tree Home Solutions location are several other trade and industry professionals, including Joe Adams and his firm known as Historic Building and Plank.

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Scott AFB military, local communities partner for national security

By KAREN PETITT
375th Air Mobility Wing Public Affairs

Airmen process a Personnel Deployment Functional line during a combat readiness exercise at Scott AFB. The readiness exercises give commanders an accurate picture of where their units can improve to make them a more effective and lethal force. Scott AFB is the largest employer in Southwestern Illinois and the fifth largest employer in the St. Louis metro region. (U.S. Air Force photo)

SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, Ill. – Nestled among corn fields and rural towns in the heartland of America is the third oldest continuously operating Air Force installation. Since 1917, it has been home to a military and civilian workforce that today exceeds 13,000.

The uniformed men and women who serve on Scott Air Force Base represent all branches of the armed forces—Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Marines, Space Force and Air Force. The base's talented team of service members, contractors, and civilian workforce perform a variety of missions spanning a wide range of specialties. They serve as experts in cyber operations and network defense, global transportation coordination via land, sea or air, aeromedical evacuation, aerial refueling and executive airlift just to name a few.

Scott Air Force Base is home to 35 major organizations with the 375th Air Mobility Wing serving as the host unit responsible for infrastructure, operational support, medical and family services for all assigned personnel. According to a Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois economic study, the business and workforce here contributes over $3 billion a year to the regional economy. The base is the largest employer in southwest Illinois and the fifth largest in the St. Louis metro area. Currently, there are construction projects valued over $300 million taking place on the base to include: a new Joint Operations Mission Planning Center, an addition to a data facility, repairs and renovations to the Air Mobility Command Headquarters building, and improvements to a flying operations building.

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