

Forsyth County News (Cumming, GA)

August 28, 2008

Appraiser plans 'corporate subdivision'

Jennifer Sami; Staff Writer

Dan Fries is bringing a whole new meaning to the term home office. The **appraiser** by trade has turned a 40-year-old home in downtown Cumming into his office space. The ambiance was so warming, five other business professionals lease the downstairs suites.

"That house had been listed for a long time and it was in rough condition when I bought it," he said. "It has a really nice view of the mountains and it was one of those properties that I think just has that curb appeal."

With such a quick response for space in the downtown area, Fries decided to turn his home office building into the central part of a subdivision of businesses.

Called **Corporate** Square, the 2.7-acre property will house six additional office buildings and a shared courtyard, much like a group of homes, Fries said.

"I think a lot of people tend to go with the cookie-cutter, 'whatever's cheap,' and 'whatever everybody else does' designs," he said.

"I've always made it a point to find a niche in the market that's not being served and that I can compete in."

All of the buildings in **Corporate Square** will have an exterior similar to that of the original home, previously owned by George Corn, to maintain the antebellum style Fries continued in the renovation.

The buildings will have wrought iron balconies, 9-foot ceilings and brick exteriors, but Fries said he wants each to be unique to its owner.

Fries is open to lease options. Just like with home buying, though, each building will have owners and each owner will have rights to the lot as well.

Although this freedom could take away from his goal of maintaining a Southern style, the square will have a "homeowners association," complete with fees and benefits.

Fees will include outdoor maintenance on land and buildings to help maintain the integrity of the office park, which Fries said is designed for doctors, lawyers, financial services and other professional industries.

While the shell of each building will fit the theme, interiors are a different matter. Realizing one interior may not be conducive to every type of business, Fries is offering three options to potential buyers.

Purchasing a full building will run just under \$500,000. Sharing building ownership will cost about half that and buying just the building's shell will total \$300,000.

Fries is contracting all construction work to Cumming Development, which has renovated several historic sites throughout the city, including the Cumming Playhouse, the Brannon Hotel and the Redd House, where the company is based.

Fries is confident his office park will be a popular addition to the downtown area.

Mike Evans, owner of nearby Cumming Station, said he remembers passing the Corn house as a child.

"I thought that was the most elegant rich house there was," he said. "Every time I saw it, it looked like something from 'Gone With the Wind.'"

Like Fries, Evans has worked to ensure his 24,000-square-foot, four-story, building blended with the style of downtown.

A few blocks from **Corporate** Square, Cumming Station has four retail components and 12 residential units.

"I like the fact that developers are going the extra mile to do it right from an aesthetic standpoint," Evans said. "And just as important, trying to capture part of the old-time downtown feel of

Cumming and not have so much emphasis placed on newer looking buildings.

"Downtown continues to be the hub of activity for the county, and certainly with what we're doing and what they're doing, it only adds to the significance of downtown Cumming to the county."

The first building will be ready to occupy in about a month, Fries said.

"This is something you can probably end up buying for less than what you can rent for," he said. "I think long term, it will be a good investment, with all that's going on in downtown Cumming."

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