

Tim Moriarty: From The Heartland

Give the car a break and catch more of downtown by walking

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Last weekend I stayed two nights at Cape Coral's newest hotel, the Hampton Inn & Suites on Southeast 47th Terrace, just west of Coronado Parkway. The 75-unit hotel opened in mid-February, and is managed by Linda Mulch, a longtime Cape resident and someone who has devoted almost her entire adult life — and childhood — to the hospitality business.

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Her parents, Don and Dee Brownfield, managed the first motel in the Cape back in 1961 when Del Prado Boulevard was a dirt road; the Nautilus Motel occupied the current site of the Quality Inn.

With gasoline prices pumping money from our wallets and traffic the way it is on the Interstates, it's become more practical for people to vacation or just plain relax closer to home. With all the big plans for downtown development in the Cape, I wanted to spend some time by getting out of my car, observing and walking the back streets of downtown to see its life.

It's far more alive and vibrant than I imagined and will become even more appealing to residents as plans for downtown development unfold.

It's interesting how one gets an entirely different perspective of what is around you when you walk rather than zoom by in our cars and trucks.

I asked Mulch about the oversized lots just east of the Hampton Inn. Those will be developed into high-rise condos; for some the benefit of

appealing package.

I started my walk midafternoon last Saturday from the Hampton Inn by heading east on Southeast 47th Terrace. My first stop was the Kiwanis Thrift Store, and I was amazed at the number of customers in the store looking for all sorts of bargains.

It was also nice to greet one of my students at Mariner High School, Katie Callahan, who volunteers at the thrift store. She is accruing volunteer hours as a requirement for a Bright Futures scholarship that she plans to use to fund her studies in fine arts at the Ringling School in Sarasota. Katie is an amazing young lady, one of the most committed students I have taught and observed in my four years at Mariner. In the mornings when most students are outside socializing while waiting for the first bell, I often see Katie buried in a book, long before others have even geared their minds to that day's studies.

Despite midafternoon heat and humidity, I observed large crowds as I walked east on 47th Terrace and peeked in at Mama Angelina's Deli, which has been in business for seven years and sits on a site of one of Cape's first supermarkets, DJ, which also opened in the 1960s.

If colorful surroundings, music, laughter, good food and large patios sound like fun, visit Bikini Joe's Beach Pub and Grill and the V-shaped chalet roof restaurant of the Twisted Conch.

including several that caught my attention: Sergeant Peppers Unisex Hair Styling, Tattoo Artistry, TC's Island Gifts, Gemini Salon, Crown Trophy and Back Streets Sports Bar. With so much competition nearby, it undoubtedly helps small businesses to have a catchy title.

The blue and white facade of Vineyard Community Church also looked familiar. I remember this location; they generously donated their facility for an all-day Mariner High faculty meeting and even provided a free luncheon, all part of what I hear is their emphasis on community outreach. I like what I read on the front entrance to the door: food pantry, 1 to 3, Monday, Wednesdays and Thursdays. They collect and help feed hungry souls.

A number of sports bars and dance clubs occupy a section of 47th Terrace, including Rack 'Em Billiards, Palmers Sports Bar and Grill, which boasts the best hamburger in Cape Coral, and the Bamboo Dance Club, which has become a popular late night hangout for older teens, many of closed.

I wanted to stop and shop at a small shoe repair business that advertised new shoes for \$3.99. A sign on the door indicated that the owner was off to Key West to purchase more shoes.

I ended my mile or so trek by stopping at the bright yellow and red-striped restaurant Mambo's Cuban-American. I really enjoy Cuban food, so it was a debate whether I wanted Cuban or Italian last Saturday night. I picked a quaint little Italian restaurant, Venezia, located just as you turn right onto Southeast 47th Terrace off Del Prado. It was a great choice; I had one of

For those who want a midweek break, check out the Wednesday night dinner-dance from 5 to 11 every Friday.

As I sat on the patio outside the Hampton Inn late Saturday night, I tried to picture what this area will look like in say two or three years. It should look beautiful, and keep and attract more people to downtown Cape who should recognize that there is no place like home.

— Tim Moriarty is a freelance writer and a Cape Coral resident. Write to him in care of The News-Press, Central Cape Business Park, 1490 Pine Island Road, Building 3, Suites B and C, Cape Coral, FL 33909, or e-mail him at timmoriarty2001@yahoo.com.

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