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SUNDAY, AUGUST 18, 2019
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Elkhart's RV sales dip ignites concerns

Analysts see industry as US economic barometer

Alexandria Burris
Indianapolis Star
USA TODAY NETWORK

Elkhart County, Indiana, proudly calls itself "the RV Capital of the World." But there's a belief that where Elkhart County goes, Indiana – and the rest of the nation – is sure to follow.

Economists like to use the RV industry, which dominates the manufacturing city on the very northern edge of Indiana, as a barometer for the health of the U.S. economy. And the news coming out of Elkhart is giving some plenty of reason to be worried.

Total wholesale shipments of recreation vehicles are down 20.3%, year to date, across the industry, signaling to some Indiana economists that a recession is on the way. Companies such as Elkhart-based Thor Industries Inc. have slashed production and cut back

See REcession, Page 8A

Cases involving public officials can be complex

Openness vs. fairness may spur tough choices

Tim Evans
Indianapolis Star
USA TODAY NETWORK

Just days after two Southern Indiana judges were shot following a night of partying in downtown Indianapolis, a police report was released detailing the actions of the two alleged assailants.

But more than three months later, the actions of the two judges – including one now facing felony charges – remain basically hidden from the public.

Very little about their role in a fight that prompted gunfire is included in the report from an Indianapolis police investigator. And, so far, authorities have released only a portion of a

See TRANSPARENCY, Page 10A



Most of the town homes and single-family houses in the 58/Bahr development on 7 acres on the east side of the 150-acre Central State campus have sold.

Work continues on homes in the 58/Bahr development at Kirkbride Way and Handley Street on the former Central State Hospital campus in Indianapolis. PHOTOS BY JENNA WATSON/INDYSTAR

'CITY WITHIN A CITY' SPRINGS BACK TO LIFE

No longer abandoned, Central State undergoes dramatic transformation

Amy Bartner Indianapolis Star | USA TODAY NETWORK



Indianapolis' skyline is seen from the vantage point of future pastures for IMPD mounted patrol horses on the former Central State Hospital campus.

Haley Richter had her heart set on buying her first home in Fountain Square.

The neighborhood had everything the 27-year-old middle school teacher was looking for, plus, she was hoping to be closer to Downtown than she was in the apartment she was renting in Broad Ripple.

But Richter couldn't find a home she loved in her \$240,000-or-less price range. She wanted a newer build, and those houses in the area were way, way out of her budget.

By February, she still hadn't found the right home after months of searching. So her real estate agent suggested she take a look at a new development about two miles west of downtown, on the 150-acre campus of the old Central State Hospital.

"He took me over there after a long day of looking for homes at Fountain Square, and I absolutely fell in love with it," she said. "There's an adorable little coffee shop just a couple feet from my house. You have access to a pool,

See CENTRAL STATE, Page 13A



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Chris Wilkes, left, and Chase Smith from Holladay Properties examine a map of Central State, a revitalized 150-acre mixed-use village on the west side of Indianapolis. Holladay Properties is working with the city to develop the former Central State Hospital campus. PHOTOS BY JENNA WATSON/INDYSTAR



The former Central State Hospital carpentry hall now houses People for Urban Progress.

Central State

Continued from Page 1A

workout facility – a brewery’s coming. The fact that I can bike to Downtown from that area is really exciting to me.”

Originally known as the Central Indiana Hospital for the Insane, the asylum on 150 acres operated from 1848 until it closed in 1994, and has been largely vacant since. The city of Indianapolis and developers have been working for more than a decade to change that, through new commercial and residential construction, as well as finding tenants for the campus’ long-empty buildings.

Seventeen svelte modern houses line Central Greens Boulevard, the main entrance to the compound off West Washington Street. The visual newness of those homes breaks quickly back to old with the former administration building-turned-apartments, Central State Mansion.

Further remnants from the hospital’s history are off to the west of the mansion, with the buildings that once served as storage, dining halls or carpentry buildings for Central State patients.

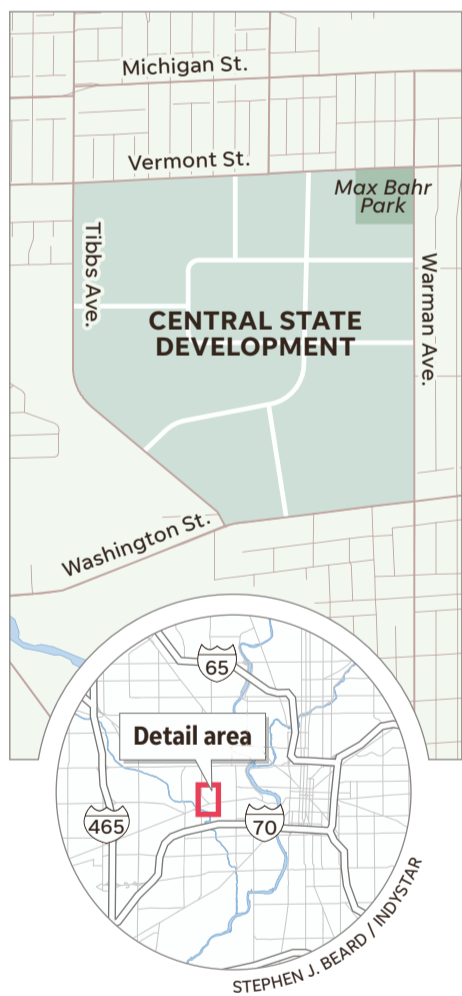
But to the east is a dramatic sign of the neighborhood’s transformation: More than 60 single-family homes and town homes constructed in the past 10 months form a new subdivision within the neighborhood.

Soon, a yet-to-be-determined, multi-million-dollar mixed-use development will sit on the southern part of the neighborhood bordering Washington Street, and a brewery will open within the year.

Developers hope more retail, restaurants and residents will follow.

A revival of residence

The city bought the land from the state in 2003 and began its revitaliza-



tion plan in 2007, 13 years after the hospital closed, said Chris Wilkes, senior vice president of Holladay Properties, the firm commissioned by the city to redevelop the neighborhood. The recession thwarted good intentions, he said. “At that time, it had been completely abandoned,” he said.

By the time Holladay Properties came on board in 2016, the original administration building had been renovated and renamed the Central State Mansion and now serves as apartments, and the hospital’s rec hall had become the 1899 event space.

The neighborhood as a whole was originally rebranded as “Central Greens” in 2016 but quickly reverted to the name most in the community connect with the site’s history, Wilkes said. “People just drifted back and connected with Central State,” he said. “There’s just something about it.”

Most of the town homes and single-family houses in the 58/Bahr development, the new subdivision that replaced the dilapidated Bahr Treatment Center on 7 acres on the east side of the campus, have sold, Wilkes said.

The new homes are part of a very conscious effort to revive the neighborhood, he said.

“There’s no better way to do that than attract homeownership,” Wilkes said. “There hadn’t been a new house built in this part of the city for a long, long time.”

He attributes the rapid sales to pent-up demand, but developers, in all honesty, didn’t know how quickly the homes would sell.

“The pace of sales was strongly surprising,” Wilkes said. “We sold out of all those sites.”

The pace is so high, house prices are up \$34,000 since January, according to Meghan Wolf, a new-home consultant at M/I Homes, the realty company at the helm of 58/Bahr.

Wolf expects strong home sales to continue as two more phases of 58/Bahr, each to include dozens of new homes, are constructed in the next few years.

“It started low, we got people here, and the prices continue to climb,” she said.

Richter became a homeowner in the Central State neighborhood in July. She’ll be sharing the 1,700-square-foot, \$240,000 home on the newly paved Handley Street with her sister and a friend.

“I never imagined myself building a home this early in life,” she said. “It’s just everything that I was looking for in Fountain Square, except I got a new home instead of an older one.”

Existing attractions

Central State’s revitalization didn’t happen overnight, though. The neighborhood is home to local T-shirt company United State of Indiana, which recently moved its printing and retail operations to the Central State cafeteria. People for Urban Progress – the organi-

zation behind those wallets made from fabric up-cycled from the RCA Dome after its 2009 implosion – moved into what was formerly the carpentry hall.

Those two local startups came after the arrival of Ignition Arts, the fabrication company responsible for the large white interactive “ndy” signs around town. The company started the trend by moving into what was the laundry building in 2016. It was the area’s first commercial tenant to move into an original structure on the compound since the hospital’s closing in 1994.

Respecting the history of the buildings and what patients did while they lived at Central State is an important part of the master plan, Wilkes said, and he hopes to emulate the community feel as it transforms.

“Those buildings gave people jobs,” Wilkes said. “They were contributing to their city within a city.”

Central State’s future

In the next few years, Central State Brewing will open a brewery in the far northwest corner of the campus. Soon, the next two phases of 58/Bahr will be constructed and an estimated \$25 million, 168,000-square-foot mixed-use development will occupy the stretch of campus bordering West Washington Street.

Ignition Arts Chief Operation Officer Tasker Day said the buildings’ size and cost fit their needs when they moved in in fall 2016, but they weren’t certain of the neighborhood’s future.

“When we came across that we knew it was a little bit of a gamble,” he said. “We liked the idea of it being a little oasis. The buildings are absolutely beautiful, and we knew single-family housing was coming at some point. We liked being at the front of that.”

But Day said he’s worried the new developments could displace existing community members through rising property values.

“That’s a concern that that area over the next 15-20 years could go the way of Irvington or Broad Ripple,” he said. “You can’t go to Broad Ripple or Irvington now and even rent a house for less than \$1,600 a month.”

Graham Brown and Grant Gilmer, co-owners of United State of Indiana, who have been on the campus since 2018, aren’t thrilled with the new housing and the impact it could have on what was open land close to Downtown.

“Neither of us think that’s cool,” Brown said. “They are eating up the green space, but with that said, there was nothing there.”

Even with the added residents, Central State is far from becoming a highly walkable neighborhood.

“It’s going to be a long time before you have foot traffic out here,” Brown said.

There are still a few unplanned acres, too: The crumbling 20,000-square-foot former power house building has no tenant, but is one of the most visibly striking structures.

And at the center of it all – between the shiny new houses, the growing retail and arts businesses and the brewery – is the Grove, a 7-acre greenspace patients once used to relax or take walks. Virtually untouched since that time, this space is intended to again become a gathering place for the community.

The land directly to the north of Central State Brewing’s future site is where the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department Mounted Patrol’s horses are housed, and graze along more than a dozen acres.

This was one of a number of selling points for Central State Brewing co-owner Jake Koeneman, who said the brewery had hoped to open originally at the site that inspired its name when it launched four years ago, but faced complications.

“So you mean to tell me we can get 1.5 acres next to a pasture in an environment that’s idyllic for our beers and still be close enough to Downtown and convention traffic?” he said. “That’s perfect.”

Koeneman said the brewery picked its name because they “had a really good idea what (Central State) could be.” Even so, the new neighborhood’s identity is still evolving.

“I think we’re going to figure that out,” he said.

Call IndyStar reporter Amy Bartner at 317-444-6752. Follow her on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



Richter

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