

New Urban communities are gaining in popularity

Concept gained a lot of traction following the Hurricane Katrina at the Mississippi Renewal Forum

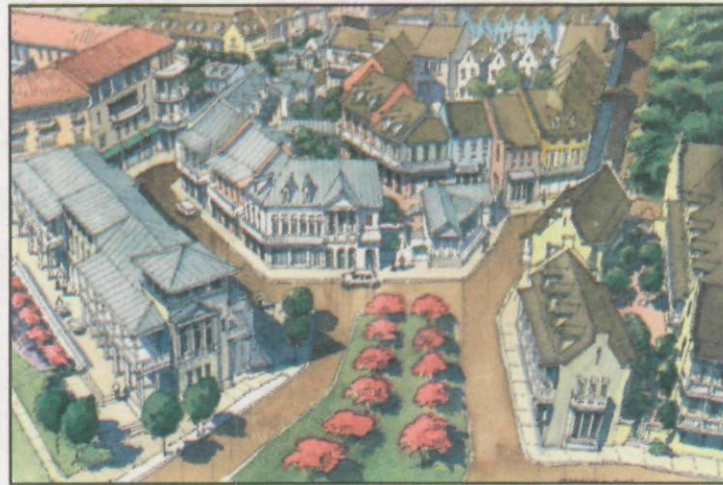
By **BECKY GILLETTE**
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New Urbanism is catching on in Mississippi. The neighborhood design movement that focuses on diverse, close-knit, walkable neighborhoods in close proximity to jobs, stores and schools started in the 1980s as an alternative to suburbs.

The concept gained a lot of traction in Mississippi with the publicity brought when the Congress for New Urbanism touted New Urbanism concepts at the Mississippi Renewal Forum held after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

A number of Coast cities have adopted "SmartCode" zoning regulations in the years since Katrina. Whereas traditional zoning puts commercial in one area and residential in another, SmartCode allows mixed-use developments that promote people being able to live near where they work, shop, attend school and go to church.

SmartCode supports community vision, local character, conservation of open lands, transit options and walkable and mixed-use neighborhoods. It is designed to prevent wasteful sprawl development, automobile-dominated streets and empty downtowns.



For the Mississippi Business Journal

After Hurricane Katrina, there has been a migration away from the most vulnerable waterfront areas of the Coast to areas on higher ground farther to the north. That could create suburban sprawl with people having to commute longer distances to work. But, the new town of Tradition, located a 15-minute drive north of Biloxi, is working to create a new community with schools such as William Carey University on the Coast, shops, restaurants and homes located in close proximity.

The town's first neighborhood is called The Village at Tradition.

"The Village is a place where gracious front porches take prominence on our streets, rather than garages and driveways," said Brynn W. Joachim, vice president of sales and marketing at Tradition Village Realty, LLC. "All of our residents love the return to traditional architecture. However, New Urbanism planning principles go far beyond architectural beauty. We narrow our streets to slow the flow of traffic that makes walking and biking

more appealing. We plan gathering spaces to encourage neighborhood interaction. We set up organizations, like our Village Institute, to plan events, seminars, and concerts to ensure that these activities continue long after the community founder's work is done."

Two new residents, a young couple who lost their home in Katrina, love the "escape" to the Village where all is not hurricane-ravaged. Joachim said they appreciate being outdoors and enjoying great scenery right in their neighborhood. In fact, they are adding an outdoor courtyard for additional entertaining space.

"One of our empty nester couples loves the smaller yard and spending less time on lawn maintenance, which allows them to relax and entertain friends and family more," Joachim said. "A young mother with a seven-year old daughter, whose home is under construction, is looking forward safe, quiet streets, and to the proximity of our parks for her child to play."

Other New Urbanism communities in Mississippi include the Cotton District in Starkville, The Township at Colony Park in Ridgeland, Lost Rabbit Development LLC at the Ross Barnett Reservoir.

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EXHIBITION

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the state as witnessed by professional and amateur photographers. "There are all sorts of structures and even signs in this exhibit," said Dunaway. "Anything created by man was considered architecture for this competition."

In the "Art by Architects" exhibit, art in various media created by AIA Mississippi members is on display. This exhibit demonstrates the wide range of artistic talent of AIAMS's architectural community.

And finally, the "AIA Award Winning Buildings" is a display featuring buildings that have received State, Regional and National Awards. This exhibit features recent architecture and affords the public a better understanding of quality in design and planning of our architectural community.

Each day during the exhibit an AIA member will be acting as a docent at the Arts

Center. Visitors will not only be able to view the exhibits but they will have an opportunity to converse with an architect, intern architect or architectural student.

Also during the exhibit, a series of lectures will be held on Thursday evenings from 5:45 to 6:45 in the Russell C. Davis Planetarium, 201 East Pascagoula Street. Thursday, March 26, Steve Dumez, AIA will present "Masked / Unmasked." On Thursday, April 2, David Cronrath, AIA Dean LSU College of Art & Design will present "Big Art." And on Thursday, April 9, Robert Canizaro, FAIA will present "Architectural Profession: Glamorous, Creative, Sexy?"

On Saturday mornings at 10 a.m., walking tours will be conducted of Jackson Downtown during the exhibit featuring the architecture of the past, the present and the future. John Dunaway, MCA Chairman and other AIA architects will lead the tours.

For more information, contact Joe Blake at 601-360-0082 or email joe@aiams.org for more information.

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Jackson fairgrounds to her list and an all-time favorite of every child who's visited the Jackson Zoo, the monkey castle on Monkey Island.

A special interest of hers is the Wood College campus in Mathiston. The college closed several years ago and operated briefly

as a retreat center before disbanding last year.

"Now its future is uncertain but it's waiting with opportunity," she said. "The campus has more than one dozen historic buildings and the unusual Cathedral in the Pines on its rolling hills location."

Biloxi architect Joey Crain points out that the Lyceum in Oxford is a university icon that represented Mississippi as the backdrop for national coverage during the first 2008 presidential debate, an historic campaign.

NEW URBAN

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Mark Frascogna, managing partner of Lost Rabbit, said the development encourages interaction between residents. People do not need to get into a car to go everywhere, and instead can visit with neighbors when walking to shops, restaurants, work or just to enjoy the scenery.

Michael A. Barranco, principal, Barranco Architecture, Town Planning and Interior Design, Jackson, who helped design the buildings in Lost Rabbit and The Township at Colony Park, said the tenants of New Urbanism are not new.

"These principles simply reinforce elements that promote and enable community from a physical standpoint," Barranco said. "The physical form, if articulated properly, then leads to the emotional and spiritual dynamics that are necessary and essential for mankind to truly live. True community is a proper balance of the physical, emotional and spiritual, all of which are found in our 'most loved places'."

Barranco said often people have so programmed their lives to focus on conveniences that they miss many beautiful opportunities that exist in their inconveniences. He is of the opinion that the preferred trend towards New Urban places is that people want to truly live again.

"People are tired of the mundane habit of waking up, entering the garage, getting in

the car and driving miles to work in a segregated building, surrounded by a parking lot or perhaps a parking garage where at lunch time they are forced to either bring their lunch or drive to eat.

"This same process is then repeated on Sundays when they once again get into their car and drive miles to their church, which has moved from the heart of the city (away from community) and into a cow pasture.

Barranco said because true New Urban communities—both old and new—now exist in places such as downtown Jackson, Belhaven, Fondren, The Township at Colony Park and Lost Rabbit, people are beginning to understand the importance of place. They are no longer "hoodwinked" by suburbia where the best thing about the neighborhood is the entry gate beyond which lies unfortunate missed opportunities, where roof forms dominate and one hesitates trying to remember which house is theirs.

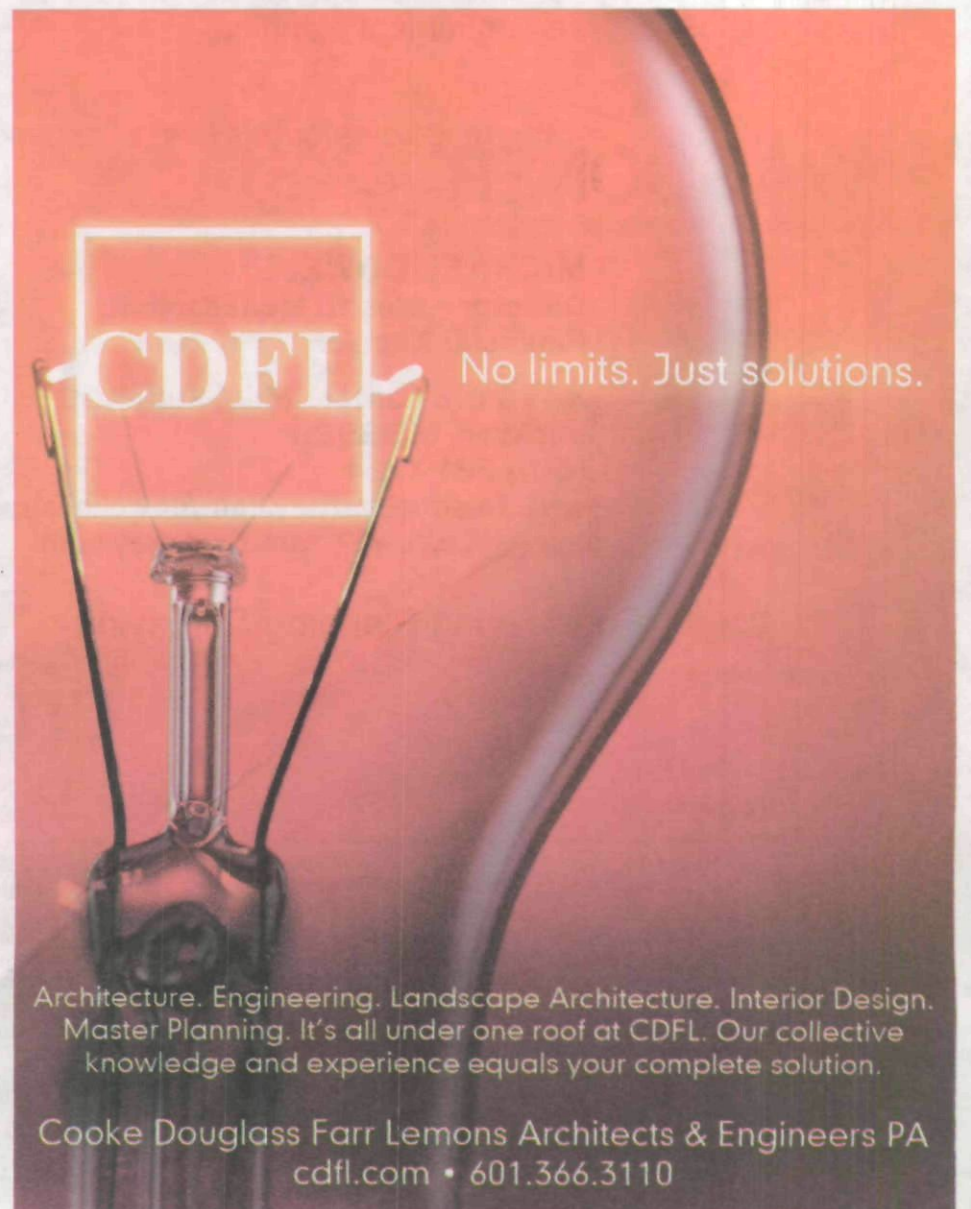
People who live in New Urban communities often say they feel more alive or connected to their community and the people and activities that occur within the community. There is a sense of pride when someone says, "I live in Fondren or Belhaven" or "I live at Lost Rabbit or The Township."

"Great New Urban (or "Old Urban") places promote connectivity," Barranco said. "It starts with the design of the plan, which translates into everything else. Very few great New Urban communities — if any — are gated."

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