

December 2014 Preservation in Progress Award
By Megan Lord

Third Street Rehabilitation Continues with Opening of “The Square”

The corner of Third Street and Desoto is coming back to life thanks to the vision and hard work of Rhonda and Jennifer Atwood. For the past year the mother-daughter team, backed by the talents of husband-father Mark Atwood, have been working to bring additional eateries to downtown Alexandria. With years of experience gained from their successful family business, Atwood’s Bakery, the Atwoods purchased this downtown property in November 2013. Just one year later, Jennifer and Rhonda are celebrating the opening of Crave, The Sandwich Shoppe, and Embers and their successful addition of breakfast, lunch, and dinner venues to the Downtown Alexandria repertoire.

The Atwoods have named the 100-year-old building that houses their collaboration, “The Square.” According to Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, the original two-story brick building featured an iron balcony on the second floor. In the early 1940s, Riley Teston, assistant manager of the Heidelberg Hotel in Baton Rouge moved to Alexandria. He purchased and remodeled the building and opened Teston’s Liquor Store. Historic photos and postcards show the building’s facade during the 1940s. In fact, the hand-painted Teston’s Liquor Store sign can be faintly seen on the front of the building today. After Teston’s closed, the building housed a variety of other businesses including several restaurants, a clothing store, and even a car dealership. During this time, the original façade was severely altered by the addition of modern brick and plate glass windows and doors and a thick layer of plaster over the second story transom windows and side elevations.



Third St. - restored



Third St. - before

Despite these alterations, the building was eligible for historic preservation tax credits. Working with Paul Smith, preservation consultant, the Atwoods planned their rehabilitation of the building and restoration of the exterior façade. The contractor for the project was Westerchil Construction working with Mark Atwood.

The Atwoods preserved or restored as much of the character of the building as they could, highlighting the character that existed in many ways. Old wood was repurposed. Old tin ceiling tiles were unable to be restored, but replicas of the original pattern were found and installed at Crave, the coffee shop facing 3rd Street. Doors to restrooms contain new translucent rippled glass windows that are reminiscent of times past. Exterior and interior door styles were designed based on research of the 1910-1915 period. As the project progressed, the exterior plaster covering the



wall on the side of the building was removed, exposing historic brick. Orange brick on the front façade was replaced to match the historic brick. Deteriorating sheetrock and cypress on the interior was removed to expose the old brick. The cypress was then repurposed in other parts of the building. A transom window opening, uncovered in the side wall, was retained and a new wood-frame window rebuilt. Several windows that had been bricked over were uncovered and new wood frames constructed and installed. Beams from this building and even some from The Gem were used for a variety of interior projects. The downstairs bar top at Embers is from cypress beams of the original building; when drilled, the smell of sap was still evident after 100 years. Some of the surfaces in the bar were made from sinker cypress slabs that measured 40 feet long x 26 inches wide by over 2 inches thick; the natural surfaces have been preserved.



Located in the heart of downtown Alexandria in the vicinity of downtown hotels and churches, the Alexandria Riverfront Center, the Alexandria Museum of Art, and so much more, “The Square” provides activities within walking distance for tourists, conventioners and spouses, as well as for local residents. These businesses at “The Square” provide a synergy that, along with the rehabilitation of this historic building, makes a significant impact toward the revitalization of downtown. For this reason, the Alexandria Historic Preservation Commission honors “The Square” and Rhonda and Jennifer Atwood with our December 2014 Preservation in Progress Award.