

# Artists and developers remake warehouse area

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Contributing Writer

The vision of artists and the pragmatism of business people is slowly coming together in Tampa's Channel District, a former warehouse area that can serve as a link between downtown Tampa and Ybor City.

To be sure, there are still a number of challenges for the Channel District, among them, parking, access and zoning.

But through cooperation between the city, property owners and developers, a slow development evolution is under way, helped in large part by the massive Channelside retail and entertainment project now rising next to the Florida Aquarium.

However, years before Channelside broke ground this month, artists began to transform the Channel District, just as they did Ybor City. Among the tenants is Artists Unlimited.

"Artists began in 1989 with eight artists in my living room," says Executive Director Genie Farrell White. "We started with 3,000 square feet of space and within 6 months, were overflowing at 6,000 feet."

These were eight artists in need of low rent studios where they could work, teach, and sell or display their creations. "Everything was in the right place at the right time,"

she said.

Genie and her husband, Bill, bought one warehouse along the port, then several other people followed suit. A graphic artist bought and moved her studio in down the street. Around the corner, a New York dance instructor bought a studio where she could teach dance and yoga.

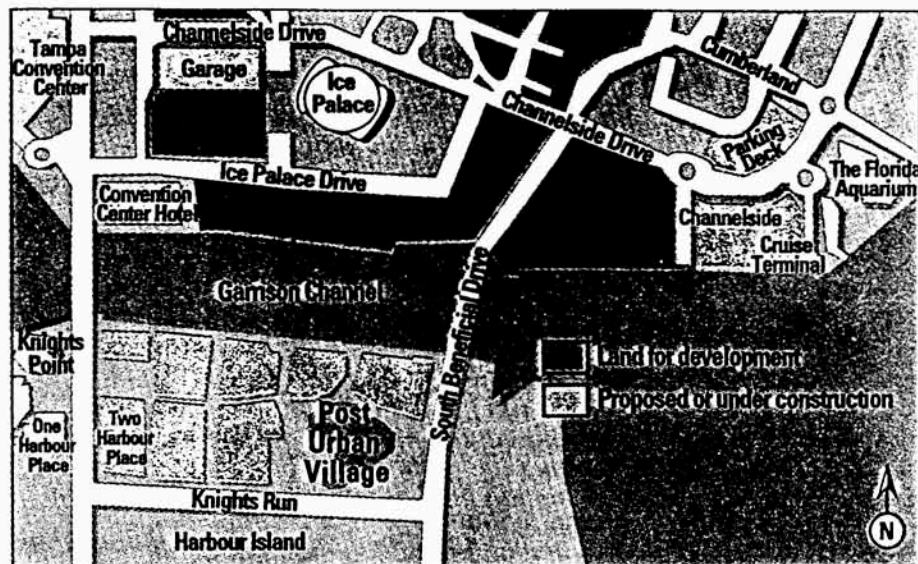
The tiny community approached city planners about rezoning so people live as well as work and teach there. Some zoning issues are still not resolved.

"Some of the zoning in the Channel District is still not in compliance," says Fernando Noriega, Tampa's director of Business & Community Services. "But most of it has been worked out in the areas where existing businesses and residences are operating."

Trolleys and tourists

One of downtown's problems is access and how to link the interesting elements that are unfortunately spread apart. The Channel District should benefit from a new streetcar system, which will begin downtown in 2000.

"It will offer a unique sightseeing tour and efficient transportation throughout the entire downtown area," Noriega said. The streetcar will start at the convention center and run along Channelside Drive into Ybor City,



Downtown's developing waterfront includes part of the evolving channel district.

stopping at the corner of Eighth Avenue and 21st Street.

"When you take the downtown core: hotel, arena, civic center, Ice Palace, and include the Warehouse District with its art shows, the entertainment and nightlife of Ybor City, the Channel District's Florida Aquarium and its booming cruise line business; you have a unique and integrated attraction which will completely change the face of Tampa," said Noriega.

Noriega anticipates that in three to five years, travelers to Tampa will spend three days of a seven-day cruise in downtown Tampa. To get ready, the Port of Tampa is currently doubling the size of its Terminal 2.

"We are anticipating both an increase in

local traffic, as well as tourist traffic along the waterfront. In 1999, Tampa will see an estimated 400,000-plus cruise passengers. That's the most in the history of Tampa," said Port spokeswoman Val Pastore.

But rapid development and the pouring of tourists into any newly readapted neighborhood has its problems.

Parking is the Channel District's present nemesis. One solution is already in progress. The Port Authority will build a parking garage across the street from the Channelside project. The city is also looking for opportunities to buy land for surface parking. There is some street parking available.

## Channel District

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### Rehabbing buildings

Meanwhile, the transformation of old warehouses continues.

Artist's Unlimited has launched an ongoing overhaul of its 27,000 square foot retreat. This warehouse has a gallery whose walls, pitted with peeling plaster, were glossed with whitewash and highlighted with track lighting. The inspiration of each individual artist is reflected in the presentation of their rented studio-stall.

A misshapen room with a small counter and irregular recesses will house a new coffee shop.

Where they're salvageable, hardwood floors have been sanded, scrubbed and polished. Where they lack hope, they have been replaced with paint spattered tile or broken pieces of marble. Most of the materials are donated by Tampa businesses that wish to contribute to the growth of the arts in the area.

Past the heavy back doors is a courtyard that houses the bulkier sculptures of local artists.

The metalwork and blacksmith shops are off to the right, painted with graffiti. Upstairs are classrooms where artists teach their vocations to all ages and level of ability. There's also a full-service photographer's studio with a professional darkroom.

Upstairs, there's a warehouse loft apartment with wrought iron balustrades and a verandah that overlooks the grounds.

A neighborhood as well as a workplace,



Courtesy of Hogan-Burt

This rendering shows Channelside, a planned retail project in the Channel District.

the Channel District is beginning to develop some of the elements of New York's Greenwich Village, some artists say.

"I am encouraged by the artists coming in and buying their buildings," says Art Keeble, executive director of the Arts Council of Hillsborough County.

"This means that the artists are protecting themselves. By owning property, they secure their own futures against the nightclub scene which has driven up prices in other areas and forced the artists out."

### Gaining an ally

The Arts Council, like other organizations, has been an ally for Artist's Unlimit-

ed. It has funded numerous shows and exhibitions such as the upcoming "A Distaff View: Three Generations of Women Photographers". The exhibit celebrates an art form known as manipulated photography.

Evon Streetman, Anna Tomczak and Amy Davis will have their photography on display in the main gallery, Sept. 18-Nov. 6. With the Tampa Port Authority underwriting projects like photography essays and the city's contribution of an electrical security gate, Artist's Unlimited has seen host to some successful campaigns.

Their first "Tools Are Arts" show had local artists demonstrating the wiles of rusty brass engines and the multiplicity of a sim-

ple hammer. The annual "Tampa Works, Tampa Plays" exhibition runs from November to January.

This year's show, "The Flamingos Are Coming!", features creations using a simple pink plastic flamingo. At the opening reception, these works will be auctioned to raise money for Children's Outreach. Outreach programs aid latch-key kids with simple learning disabilities like dyslexia and attention-deficit disorder. This supplemental learning center works with 30 to 90 children, and maintains a waiting list. It takes a more hands-on approach to teaching where children express themselves in artwork.

### More than art

The Channel District, however, isn't all art.

From its conception, the Florida Aquarium was destined to be the jewel of the district. Surrounding developments, such as Channelsidewere intended to enhance it.

"We are ecstatic that we are able to provide the entertainment venue for the renovation," said John Twomey III, vice president of development for Hogan-Burt, the Tampa developer building Channelside.

This hub of shops, restaurants and new high-tech IMAX movie theater, is going up adjacent to the newly refurbished cruise Terminal 2.

"This is just one small piece of the puzzle. What is really exciting is the high concentration of development, all taking place along the waterfront, along one quarter mile stretch of street, in an urban area that is well lit, beautifully landscaped and safe," Twomey said. ■

*In this case, pooling our resources adds*