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Downtown living has perks, say residents

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Ruth Lantz and her husband, Bill, traded their 3,700-square-foot house on E. Town Street for a Downtown loft.

One Downtown resident said she likes that the sidewalks clear after 6 p.m. and a dead quiet falls.

"That's sort of nice," Ruth Lantz said. "We have the place to ourselves."

Another sees the upside of developers at Carlyles Watch auctioning up to 24 condos at the 100 E. Gay St. development.

"The first I heard, I thought, 'Oh my God, this doesn't look good,'" said Kevin Wood, president of the Downtown Residents Association and a 3rd Street homeowner. "Now, I'm thinking on the positive side. At least I'll have more neighbors."

A third sees the first uptick in Downtown population in 50 years as only the beginning.

"We found out there are a lot of people fed up with the suburbs," said Miranova resident and Downtown Commission Chairman Harrison Smith. "We had, though we didn't know it, a pent-up demand for housing that was way beyond what anybody imagined."

Nearly halfway through Mayor Michael B. Coleman's 10-year plan to add 10,000 Downtown housing units, the city announced plans last week to buy down-trodden Columbus City Center. A day earlier, developers of just-built Carlyles Watch said they'll auction up to 24 unsold condos to cash out of

Downtown.

For a while now, people have been complaining that Downtown housing is priced too high for most, and that there's not enough to do for those who can pay the price.

Yet, the Downtown housing push is working.

From 2000 through 2006, an estimated 1,000 people moved Downtown. The 29 percent jump was the first population increase there in 50 years.

Despite a national housing slump, 88 homes in Downtown proper have sold this year. That's more than twice as many than sold this year in an area south of Downtown that includes German Village, the Brewery District, Schumacher Place and Merion Village.

People who've lived Downtown a year or more say the good vastly outweighs the bad.

"I'm definitely staying Downtown and definitely staying in the Arena District," said Ryan Arbogast, 27, who paid \$350,000 for a Burnham Square two-bedroom condo last year.

His mortgage is "more doable than you think," helped by the rent he charges on the German Village house he previously lived in.

Arbogast especially likes Sunday play dates for his bulldog with other residents who gather with their dogs, and said he's made more friends this year than any year in his life.

He and his fiancée are planning to shop the Condominiums at North Bank Park for a larger space after they get married.

"We'll probably continue to move around the Downtown area for the next five or 10 years until we have children," he said.

Arbogast, an engineer, and many of his neighbors wish parking for their guests was easier and that less-expensive condos and apartments would become available.

But they don't complain about shopping.

Many say they get groceries from the North Market and stores in German Village, the Brewery District and Victorian Village. They travel to Lennox Town Center to shop at Target or Hudson Avenue for Lowe's.

"Tell me which suburban person buys groceries across the street from where they live," said Lantz, who has lived with her husband Downtown since 1990. "It's a mentality we have to change."

In their 60s, the couple moved in August from a 132-year-old house on E. Town Street that they bought in 1989 and restored. At The Lofts at 106, artist Ruth and engineer Bill designed their own double-size, two-story penthouse loft.

"I've always wanted this open, no-walls concept," Ruth Lantz said. "To be able to travel and walk away, not being tied to a property—that's why Downtown living is so nice."

Damon Dalrymple, 40, and his partner, Tim Knapp, 43, bought the Lantz house a year ago, ready to tend an apple, cherry and apricot orchard and the 3,700-square-foot house. Art broker Knapp tends the garden,

operates Lyle Gallery in part of the house and works for Franklin County.

Dalrymple owns Studio 35 theater in Clintonville, where he lived while raising his son.

"I was in the house five minutes and decided to buy it," Dalrymple said. "I don't think Tim and I will sell this house. It will be my son who sells it after I'm dead."

He likes walking to museums and restaurants, the library and to movies in the Arena District.

"My partner and I have a net worth over \$1 million, but I'll take the bus," he said. "It's part of the community, part of the process."

Knapp scoffed at those who say Downtown has no nightlife.

"There are some people who could be in New York City and say the same thing," he said. "There's stuff to do every night of the week."

The Carlyles Watch auction on Oct. 28 could be a turning point, Downtown homeowners say. If condos sell for half of the original asking prices, they could attract those who can't afford the median \$298,500 price paid between 2002 and 2006.

"A lot of prices Downtown were too high in the beginning," Ruth Lantz said. "Maybe the auction will encourage people to see it as a bargain (and) more people would be willing to take a chance."

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