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**2011**  
**RUDY BRUNER AWARD**  
**PROJECT DATA**



# PROJECT DATA

Please answer questions in space provided. Answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

NOTE: This sheet and a selected image will be sent to the Committee in advance.

Project Name Midtown Alley - Blight to Flight Location Midtown St. Louis, MO  
 Owner Midtown Alley, LLC  
 Project Use(s) creative incubator for startup and spin off firms as well as relocating and expansion of existing firms  
 Project Size see attached Midtown Alley map - 37 buildings complete Total Development Cost about 70 million \$  
 Annual Operating Budget (if appropriate) \$35,000 out of pocket costs for branding, street festival & marketing  
 Date Initiated June, 2002 Percent Completed by December 1, 2010 98%  
 Project Completion Date (if appropriate) ongoing development  
 Attach, if you wish, a list of relevant project dates \_\_\_\_\_

**Application submitted by:**

Name Mary Thaelke Title President  
 Organization Midtown Alley, LLC  
 Address 3001 Locust 2nd Floor City/State/Zip St. Louis/MO/63103  
 Telephone ( 314 ) 346-8659 Fax ( 314 ) 652-0802  
 E-mail mary@toky.com Weekend Contact Number (for notification): 314-346-8659

**Perspective Sheets:**

Organization	Name	Telephone/e-mail
Public Agencies		
Alderwoman	Kacie Starr Triplett	314-621-5249 kacietriplett@yahoo.com
Architect/Designer	Jassen Johnson	314-614-6181 jassen@rdallc.net
Developer	Renaissance Development Associates Stan Clark	314-565-7465 stan@rdallc.net
Professional Consultant	Toky Branding & Design Eric Tholke	314-534-2000 eric@toky.com
Community Group	Food Outreach Greg Lukeman	314-652-3663 greg@foodoutreach.org
Other		

Please indicate how you learned of the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*. (Check all that apply).

- Direct Mailing   
  Magazine Announcement   
  Previous Selection Committee member   
  Other (please specify)  
 Professional Organization   
  Previous RBA entrant   
  Online Notice  
 Bruner/Loeb Forum

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Signature  Date 12-9-10

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**2011**  
**RUDY BRUNER AWARD**  
**PROJECT**  
**AT-A-GLANCE**



# PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

Please answer questions in space provided. Answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

NOTE: This sheet and a selected image will be sent to the Committee in advance.

Project Name Midtown Alley Blight to Flight

Address 3001 Locust 2nd Floor City/State/ZIP St. Louis/MO/63103

1. Give a brief overview of the project.

This project began in 2002 when a graduate student from the University of IL School of Architecture passed through the blighted neighborhood and saw demolition activities in an area flush with existing significant historic building stock. He vowed at that time, he would come back to this neighborhood following graduation and work to save and restore the abandoned community in the central corridor of St. Louis.

Working with a small group of maverick entrepreneurs, an urban plan was developed to save and transform the neighborhood into a creative incubator for the collaboration of creative firms such as: branding and design, photography, public relations, marketing and architectural services. Residential, restaurants and retail businesses were planned to supplement the creative firms and provide a foundation to sustain the community.

Midtown Alley, LLC was developed to create an identity for the neighborhood. The LLC is a 10-15 member steering committee with representatives from both the residents and businesses within the area. This steering committee's charge is to utilize the brand to continue to promote the neighborhood and build collaboration both within the neighborhood and throughout the region.

All promotional activities to date have been funded through pro bono work provided by the incubator businesses and residents of the neighborhood.

2. Why does the project merit the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*? (You may wish to consider such factors as: effect on the urban environment; innovative or unique approaches to any aspect of project development; new and creative approaches to urban issues; design quality.)

The Midtown Alley neighborhood's rebirth, unlike other neighborhoods in the region, was complicated by the fact that there was no residential housing infrastructure which is the typical catalyst for redevelopment. The small scale commercial buildings made it financially unattractive to the typical development company.

Due to the unattractive profitability for investors, the neighborhood remained blighted although surrounded by the Central Business District, St. Louis University and the Center for Arts and Entertainment.

To address these issues an urban mixed use master plan for the district was developed. Venture capitalists were sought to catapult the neighborhood through redevelopment of multiple buildings simultaneously. Pairing development with successful collaboration and branding efforts secured the neighborhood's rebirth.

We believe this project merits great consideration for the award from the Rudy Bruner Foundation as it represents a model for innovative approaches to rebirth of urban blighted areas across America.

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**2011**  
**RUDY BRUNER AWARD**  
**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**



# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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1. Describe the underlying values and goals of the project. What, if any, significant trade-offs were required to implement the project?

Several significant trade-offs are being experienced in order to implement this project. Due to the small scale of the building projects, the pace of lease-up and minimal funds available for contingency due to unforeseen conditions, the investors will not see financial profitability for several years. Additionally, the downturn in the economy requires a greater equity investment and opens up the investors to elevated risk. Therefore, the pool of available investors is limited to those having a vested interest in seeing the community move from blight to flight.

2. Briefly describe the project's urban context. How has the project impacted the local community? Who does the project serve? How many people are served by the project?

The Midtown Alley neighborhood revitalization is located in the middle of the central corridor for the city and is surrounded by major financial institutions, downtown redevelopment efforts, two major universities, and the Center for Arts and Entertainment. Thus making it a melting pot of diversity.

Prior to redevelopment of the neighborhood, the adjacent institutions had built self-contained campuses with no interaction with their neighbors. The Midtown Alley development has provided a "backyard" for these businesses and their employees to come together to live, work, laugh and play.

The Midtown Alley Street Fest has been instrumental in encouraging these same neighbors to get to know their community and join the collaborative effort to continue the growth of the area. Now, within a 1 mile radius of the center of the three by six block community, over 36,000 people are able to experience the energy of a neighborhood alive with creative businesses, restaurants and retail vendors. The once crime ridden, depressed area is full of life and has continued to grow even in a poor economic environment.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION (CONT'D)

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3. Describe the key elements of the development process, including community participation where appropriate.

Urban Plan - The development of the urban plan was critical to address the lack of housing and services needed to build a long term self sustaining neighborhood built around the creative incubator. The most important part of the plan was addressing the core tenant needs and determining when the supplemental businesses could open and be profitable.

Steering Committee - A 10-15 member group of vested business owners and residents collectively participate in developing activities, events and meetings in the neighborhood to build collaboration, awareness, and promotion.

Financial Investment - A significant amount of investment dollars and building assemblage was carefully orchestrated to underwrite the multi-building development project. Multiple incentives programs were utilized in order to finance and make the projects viable.

Branding and Marketing - Due to the negative perception of the neighborhood from years of crime and blight, a grass roots driven re-brand and marketing campaign was established and continues to be implemented. This effort has been underwritten to date by incubator businesses now established in the community.

4. Describe the financing of the project. Please include all funding sources and square foot costs where applicable.

This community development project has been financed through utilizing private equity funds from multiple investors, multiple lending institutions, and the use of federal and state Historic Tax Credits, Tax Increment Financing, Brownfield Environmental Tax Credits, Community Block Grant funds, and countless hours of sweat equity. Typically acquisition costs have ranged from \$15-\$30 per square foot and construction costs range from \$85-\$100 per square foot.

5. Is the project unique and/or does it address significant urban issues? Is the model adaptable to other urban settings?

This project is unique in that it has brought a blighted area to a sustainable stage with mixed use development, staged urban planning, and collaboration being the key to success. The grass roots efforts of the businesses in collaboration with the developer has provided a model that could be used in other cities wishing to battle the disintegration of neighborhoods.

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**2011**  
**RUDY BRUNER AWARD**  
**COMMUNITY**  
**REPRESENTATIVE**  
**PERSPECTIVE**



# COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by someone who was involved, or who represents an organization that was involved, in helping the project respond to neighborhood issues.

Name Greg Lukeman Title Director  
Organization Food Outreach Telephone ( 314 ) 652-3663  
Address 3117 Olive Street City/State/ZIP St. Louis/MO/63103  
Fax ( 314 ) 652-3673 E-mail greg@foodoutreach.org

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Signature Gregory Lukeman Date 12/9/2010

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play?

Food Outreach is a non-profit nutritional support organization established in 1988 that provides groceries, prepared meals and nutrition counseling to low-income men, women, and children living with HIV/AIDS or Cancer in the greater St. Louis area. The volunteer driven organization serves client ages range from 2 years old to over 90. Clients can pick up food, join in a weekly congregate meal and have home delivery if needed.

As Director of an organization located in the heart of Midtown Alley and a member of the Midtown Alley Steering Committee, I myself, as well as others working within my organization, have worked side by side with other members of the Steering Committee to staff and promote events and festivals within the neighborhood. We initially became involved in the committee when approached by the architect and visionary for input on the urban plan developed for the neighborhood. Our involvement grew as we embraced the plan and became excited about the potential growth of our community.

2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

As a community, many were skeptical about the possibility of the plan coming to fruition. This skepticism was based upon the overwhelming amount of blight, crime and the poor reputation of the area. However, once development began in the neighborhood, the community immediately began to spark with life. We had never experienced any spark of hope for this community in a long while. The energy and excitement of new development ignited the existing occupants to become engaged in the project.

With the branding of Midtown Alley, LLC the negative reputation of the neighborhood was quickly squashed. The fresh brand, creative people and new residential dwellers provide a new perspective of the region. People now look to Midtown Alley as a destination for dining, entertainment and living as opposed to a place that is to be avoided.

## COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

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3. Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how?

Absolutely!!!! You have to see it to believe it. No one even lived in this neighborhood previously outside of squatters in the vacant buildings. Due to the creative nature of the developers/architects working in the neighborhood, some of our residential dwellings have even won awards. Most of the commercial spaces were abandoned. They are now filled with successful restaurants, creative firms, etc.

4. Would you change anything about this project or the development process you went through?

I, like others within the community, truly appreciate the sacrifice that the developers working in the neighborhood have experienced. These individuals have had some major roadblocks that have been costly to them, personally. Many would have turned and ran during the economic downturn. These individuals and the other business owners of the neighborhood utilized their own resources and an extensive amount of personal time to ensure the success of this project. It is greatly appreciated.

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**2011**  
**RUDY BRUNER AWARD**  
**PUBLIC AGENCY**  
**PERSPECTIVE**



# PUBLIC AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by a staff representative of a public agency directly involved in the financing, design review, or public approvals that affected this project.

Name Kacie Starr Triplett Title Alderwoman  
Organization City of St. Louis Telephone ( 314 )  
Address City Hall Room 230, 1200 Market Street City/State/ZIP St. Louis/MO/63103  
Fax ( 314 ) 622-4273 E-mail kacietriplett@yahoo.com

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Signature Kacie Starr Triplett Date 12-9-10

1. What role did your agency play in the development of this project? Describe any requirements made of this project by your agency (e.g., zoning, public participation, public benefits, impact statements).

As alderwoman for the 6th Ward in St. Louis, Missouri, I strongly urge your consideration of the Midtown Alley, LLC application for the Rudy Bruner Award. The Midtown Project is truly, what I believe, your award is all about. This project has revitalized the Midtown area from "Rags to Riches" - urban development at its best. The ambitious efforts of a few entrepreneurs who were determined to preserve the architectural grandeur of this area has inspired others to relocate existing businesses, develop new businesses and actually move to the area to live, work and play.

My office has supported this project in a number of ways from allocating funds for new sidewalks and trash receptacles to additional security for the neighborhood. My office supports the TIF for the area and also has assisted with a facade capital program. Currently, we are working towards forming a Community Improvement District which reallocates 3/4 of one cent from sales tax purchases to this area which will be utilized for additional beautification projects and security.

Additionally, I serve as an advocate for potential tenants interested in relocating to St. Louis, specifically the Midtown Neighborhood. My office is able to act as a conduit for additional governmental incentives specific to the tenant's business.

2. How was this project intended to benefit your city? What trade-offs and compromises were required to implement the project? How did your agency participate in making them?

This project has taken this neighborhood from boarded up buildings and desolate streets to a thriving business and residential community. Five years ago, most people would not have ventured into this area of the city after dark. In the past five years, nine restaurants have opened in the area as well as thirty-three other small businesses. The city is benefiting from the sales tax revenue produced from the area businesses and from permit and inspection fees assessed in construction projects.

As far as trade-offs and compromises, I wish I had more funding to provide to the project but I must spread my budget over the entire ward. Additionally, projects like these do require more of a time commitment from me personally. However, this has definitely been well worth the effort.

## PUBLIC AGENCY PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

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3. Describe the project's impact on your city. Please be as specific as possible.

The biggest impact that I believe this has provided to the city is a hope for individuals who have lost their jobs due to the downturn in the economy. A number of jobless people have found alternate career paths through the incubator formed in Midtown. Those individuals can now, with the assistance of the Midtown Alley, LLC, begin a new chapter in their lives and be self supportive and successful.

4. Did this project result in new models of public/private partnerships? Are there aspects of this project that would be instructive to agencies like yours in other cities?

The grass root efforts by the business owners and residents of the neighborhood who have utilized their own funds to brand and market the neighborhood is phenomenal. Additionally, all profits generated from any festivals or events in the neighborhood have been donated to the non profits located within the Midtown Alley Neighborhood. These include such organizations as Food Outreach and St. Louis for Kids.

5. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

The most successful aspect of this project is the preservation of some of the most historic buildings in the city of St. Louis. Some of these buildings had been setting empty for decades with each passing year of abandonment compounding their fragile state. People often comment to me, "Wow, I haven't been in this part of the city for years, it sure has changed since I was here last. I can't believe the progress that has taken place here in the past few years." Another person said when attending the Midtown Alley Festival, "I had to come down here and see this to believe it. People are actually out in the streets of Midtown having a festival and having a great time." The energy that the Midtown Alley, LLC infuses into the business owners, residents and visitors to the area is contagious and makes you feel like you want to be a part of this exciting movement.

The least successful aspect of the project is that it has endured many stumbling blocks due to the economy. Slated businesses that would have most likely succeeded in relocating to the area in good financial times, often could not get the financial backing to make the move. Progress in the neighborhood was very much effected by the downturn in the economy. Only through the resilience of those who had and still have a vision for the neighborhood has this project endured and moved forward.

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**2011**  
**RUDY BRUNER AWARD**  
**DEVELOPER**  
**PERSPECTIVE**



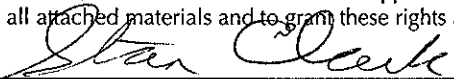
# DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by the person who took primary responsibility for project financing or is a representative of the group which did.

Name	Stan Clark	Title	President
Organization	Renaissance Development Associates	Telephone ( 314 )	565-7465
Address	3010 Locust Street	City/State/ZIP	St. Louis, MO 63101
Fax ( 314 )	652-0802	E-mail	stan@rdallc.com

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Signature		Date	12-7-10
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1. What role did you or your company play in the development of this project? Describe the scope of involvement.

Renaissance Development Associates (RDA) worked in several capacities to assure the transformation of this Midtown St. Louis neighborhood. Initially, work was done to find investors, secure purchase of various buildings and assist with plan designs that would compliment the needs of each perspective incubator. Once this step was completed, RDA's assistance varied dependent on the need of the client. For some this included assistance with securing funding to make the project viable such as tax credits, Brownfield funding, etc. For others, it was actual construction work to build out spaces. Still others utilized our services as owner's representative to oversee their project. RDA partners also committed funds to projects as investors in order to make very high risk projects meet financial requirements demanded by funding sources.

2. What trade-offs or compromises were required during the development of the project?

High levels of financial risk are at stake for the investors. In most cases, months of empty lease space, high interest rates and bureaucratic red tape have held up projects. Cash calls have been made to keep projects afloat while fighting to get spaces full so that incoming revenue from leasing could carry the project.

Investors have mortgaged about everything they have to keep the project afloat. Contractors, architects, etc. have been very understanding about receiving payment for services rendered. Some agreed to put off collection of payment for six months or more in order to secure work on the projects and see the neighborhood's rebirth.

Some trade-offs were made in construction where special features that would have enhanced the appearance of the building or build out were modified to meet financial constraints so that the project would fund.

Pro bono design work by the architect has played an instrumental role in securing businesses for the area. We feel that his efforts have been instrumental in assisting clients in having a unique space at a cost that would not be feasible in other neighborhoods in St. Louis.

## DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

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3. How was the project financed? What, if any, innovative means of financing were used?

This project was financed from every possible revenue source available. Use of historic tax credits, Brownfield environmental funds, Tax Incremental Financing, second mortgages on investor's homes, farm land, and commercial real estate holdings have all been utilized to grow Midtown, St. Louis.

The energy and enthusiasm put forth by Jassen Johnson, Mary Thaelke and Eric Thaelke has spurred outside interest in the neighborhood. They are great spokespersons/salespersons for the neighborhood and have been and continue to be vital to the neighborhood's growth.

4. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of the project?

The most successful aspect of the project is the sense of satisfaction brought forth through preservation of some of the most unique architectural buildings in St. Louis.

Also, there is an energy that people in the neighborhood possess that comes from conquering blight and has brought about almost a sense of family. When visiting with residents and business owners you can feel their pride in the neighborhood. It is contagious and provides a feeling of security to prospective residents and business entrepreneurs.

The least successful aspect of the project is the financing. One long-time venture capitalist involved said it was the most difficult investment (financially) that he had ever been part of. He commented, "It is not supposed to be this hard."

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**2011**  
**RUDY BRUNER AWARD**  
**PROFESSIONAL**  
**CONSULTANT**  
**PERSPECTIVE**



# PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by a professional who worked as a consultant on the project providing services other than physical design or planning (e.g., legal services).

Name	Eric Thoelke	Title	owner
Organization	Toky Branding & Design Associate	Telephone	( 314 ) 534-2000
Address	3001 Locust 2nd Floor	City/State/ZIP	St. Louis, MO 63103
Fax	( 314 ) 652-0802	E-mail	eric@toky.com

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Signature 

Date 12.10.10

1. What role did you or your organization play in the development of this project?

TOKY Branding & Design is an award-winning branding agency located within Midtown Alley. Our team of print and web designers used their expertise to create the Midtown Alley brand. We developed the logo, area maps, ads, billboards and the web site (see [www.midtownalley.com](http://www.midtownalley.com) and attached map of the area) to promote the neighborhood and the festivals/events happening within its boundaries. We became involved in this project because we saw the potential for a run down area of the city to blossom into an exciting redevelopment area that many people would love to live, work and play.

2. Describe the project's impact on its community. Please be as specific as possible.

This project has definitely made our community a better place to live. No one even lived in this area before or ever wanted to open a business or restaurants. Now we can barely keep up with the number of people wanting to see available spaces to buy or lease. Midtown Alley was voted the "best new restaurant neighborhood" in the RFT (River Front Times) this past year. The roadblocks to making this area as successful as it has been enormous and have only been overcome by the "people" in the area, their own dollars, and desire to make this piece of St. Louis a place that others want to be a part of, TOKY included.

## PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

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### 3. How might this project be instructive to others in your profession?

The importance of the branding and design in this project should not be overlooked. The brand alone has brought in more developers to buy more buildings and create even more spaces for people to buy, lease, live or work. The ongoing advertising for both the area and the annual Midtown Alley Streetfest, brings people to our area and makes them want to keep coming back.

As new businesses develop in the neighborhood they look to TOKY as a source for their branding and design needs. Our initial pro bono work for the neighborhood has yielded additional business for us now and in the future.

### 4. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

The collaboration that took place to see this project to fruition was insane. Without the intense team effort of many, many individuals, this project would not have succeeded. I believe this was the most successful aspect of the project besides the preservation of some magnificent historical buildings. This project also put a very historical part of the city (formally known as auto row) back in the news. Several news pieces have been produced regarding the history of this area and the revitalization that has taken place.

As far as the least successful aspect, I only wish that the banking within the community was in better shape for all the people wanting to do even more projects in the neighborhood but can not get financing. Many of us in this area have invested a huge amount of time and money in Midtown Alley. Additional funding from grants or other revenue sources would allow us to do even more for our neighborhood.

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**2011**  
**RUDY BRUNER AWARD**  
**ARCHITECT**  
**OR DESIGNER**  
**PERSPECTIVE**



# ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE

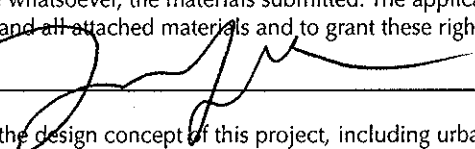
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This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services.

Name	Jassen Johnson	Title	Architect / Urban Planner
Organization	Midtown Alley, LLC	Telephone ( 314 )	652-0800
Address	3010 Locust Suite 102	City/State/ZIP	St. Louis, MO 63103
Fax ( 314 )	652-0802	E-mail	jassen@rdallc.net

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Signature



Date

12/9/10

1. Describe the design concept of this project, including urban design considerations, choice of materials, scale, etc.

There are two intriguing aspects of the existing building stock in of the Midtown Alley neighborhood that have been crucial to its success. The first aspect is the pedestrian friendly scale and density of the buildings. Midtown Alley was comprised of only commercial buildings, most under three stories in height. Even through heavy blight most remained intact with minimal separation between structures. The neighborhood was built as an automotive sales area so the buildings have large storefronts on the ground floor that would have been car showrooms of days past. The scale of these building and the friendly nature of the big storefronts leave the user with a sense of community that is friendly, walk-able, and not "too urban".

Most blighted neighborhoods of St. Louis that go through gentrification start by urban pioneers rehabbing the historic homes and then the businesses filter into service the residential population. Due to the fact there was no residential housing stock to work with the second key aspect of the project was our ability to start from scratch. Keeping in mind we wanted to build a long term self sustaining neighborhood that attracted creative firms we worked from the urban plan to bring in density of business and housing by producing all mixed use developments. All the first floor spaces in the neighborhood are comprised of commercial creative offices and strategically placed restaurants, retail, and other services that are vital to a successful neighborhood. All the upper floors of the neighborhood are comprised of residential lofts both custom designed residential condos and apartments. Because we were able basically start over with wonderful architectural stock we've been able to create a neighborhood that people love and one that really works. +

2. Describe the most important social and programmatic functions of the design.

Due to the heavy blight in the neighborhood we had to be pragmatic on how to attract people back to area. We focused on becoming a creative incubator for existing and start-up creative firms because they typically can see the vision of what the future could be must easier than most people. Building creative firms that filled the storefronts with highly visible and innovative design context with a flourish of activity helped to fill the residential units and thus built a demand for restaurants and retail that soon followed. It was crucial to build in this order to insure the success of the services that make the area stable. The high design that is integral to creative firms set the tone for innovative design in the residential units and other business that continue to join the Midtown Alley neighborhood. This creativity has finally filtered over to the branding of the neighborhood which now drives all that is creative about Midtown Alley.

## ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

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3. Describe the major challenges of designing this project and any design trade-offs or compromises required to complete the project.

In order for anyone to even consider moving to the Midtown Alley neighborhood a large scale multi-building development plan had to be developed to showcase and prove the neighborhood's rebirth was real and ongoing.

This was difficult because the developments needed to be adjacent to each other and also play into the urban plan that had been created. Building assemblage, financing, tenants, and the development team had to be delicately pulled together and executed without a hiccup or it could potentially fail before it had a chance to really take off.

After jumping this major hurdle with much success this same plan has been repeated several times always with its own set of obstacles that always lead to compromises. Fortunately the bigger picture has remained intact and progress continues.

The most recent obstacle has been maintaining the high level of design that has been expected with now much more limited budgets due to the current economic conditions.

4. Describe the ways in which the design relates to its urban context.

The creative design work that we are able to execute plays hand in hand with the creative users that work in the neighborhood, the creative people that dwell in the neighborhood, and those other creatives we are constantly trying to attract to the neighborhood. The urban and funky architectural work plays off the urban area we are located in and the historic buildings that we are redeveloping.

# A COOL NEW NEIGHBORHOOD TO CALL HOME.



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www.exostl.com

**Firebird**  
2706 Olive St. | 314.535.0353  
www.firebirdstl.org

**FUBAR**  
*Concert Venue and Lounge*  
3108 Locust St. | 314.289.9050  
www.fubarstl.com

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3124 Olive St. | 314.721.8427  
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**PW Shoe Lofts**  
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3117 Olive St. | 314.652.3663  
www.foodoutreach.org

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www.neostl.com

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www.stlouis4kids.org

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www.tlw-law.com

**Wells Fargo Advisors**  
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www.wellsfargoadvisors.com

## CREATIVITY & CONCEPTS

**Art Partners: Dubinsky, Forgelman, Marcus and Sprague**  
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314.862.2333

**CK Design**  
*Concrete Design and Products*  
3021 Locust St. | 314.772.6471  
www.ckconcretedesign.com

**Clarion**  
*Marketing & Advertising*  
3117 Locust St. | 314.333.4315  
www.clarionstl.com

**FK Photography**  
*Photography Studio*  
2745 Locust St. | 314.241.3811  
www.fkphoto.com

**Four Alarm**  
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www.4alarmstudio.com

**Gauthier Gallery**  
*Live/Work Art Gallery*  
3150 Locust St. | 314.570.4867

**Jupiter Studios**  
*Recording Studios*  
3323 Locust St. | 314.535.5556  
www.jupiterstudios.net

**Lamar Advertising**  
2745 Locust St. | 314.531.4760  
www.lamar.com

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3118 Locust St.  
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**Moto Museum**  
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**The Nu Art Series**  
2936 Locust St. | 314.535.6500  
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**Origin Agency**  
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314.644.4646  
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www.hotelignaciostl.com

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www.plushstlouis.com

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3229 Washington Ave.  
www.urbanchestnut.com

# Midtown Revival

Can Midtown Alley become the next Loop? **BY JARRETT MEDLIN**

**I**t appears as an oasis in a sea of unassuming businesses and boarded-up buildings.

Driving west along Locust Street, from Jefferson to Grand, you notice a striking pattern: High-rise lofts near downtown give way to blue-collar businesses like Industrial Process Equipment and Lawler & Balthasar Auto Repair. A roofers' union sits across from a block-wide empty lot. After you pass a stop sign at Garrison Avenue, the landscape suddenly changes to sleek storefronts with plate-glass windows and historic markers on brick exteriors. Intricate terra cotta hints at a neighborhood that once flourished—and could again.

At 3005 Locust, Hector Caiazza climbs a winding staircase inside a revamped 8,600-square-foot space that houses a photo studio and a custom furniture business. Next door, customers browse racks at Anatomy of Style, an appointment-only boutique. A block south, along Olive Street, foot traffic begins to pick up at The Good Pie and Pappy's Smokehouse as lunchtime approaches.

Here, a small group of entrepreneurs is transforming a once-abandoned neighborhood into a thriving hub it's dubbing Midtown Alley. The group leading the charge, Renaissance Development Associates, estimates it has coordinated \$60 million's worth of projects in the area during the past six years. Where there was once an excess of vacant buildings, new businesses are now generating an estimated \$6 million in annual sales. This month alone, at least four more businesses,



The 3100 block of Olive Street is one part of a revived section of St. Louis being marketed as Midtown Alley. Businesses like TOKY Branding + Design and The Good Pie have transformed the neighborhood in recent years.

including a doctor's office, are slated to enter the fold.

For St. Louis, it marks a significant development. Here is the missing link in a chain that runs through the city's central corridor—the piece that could connect the Central West End and Grand Center with downtown and the Loft District. “St. Louis has all of these pockets with voids in between,” explains Caiazza, “and I think midtown is filling one of those voids.”

After a moment, he adds, “It could be the next Loop.”

**T**he revival began as a thesis. Jassen Johnson, a curly-haired farm boy from Watseka, Ill., was studying architecture and business at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and doing a project on urban renewal in East St. Louis when he stumbled onto midtown during his daily commute. “I was driving through this neighborhood all the time and thinking what great anchors are here,” he says—referring to Grand Center, colleges like Saint Louis University and Harris-Stowe State University, and corporations like Sigma Aldrich

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH MONKEN

and Wells Fargo—"and wondering why this neighborhood hadn't been developed." It became the subject of his thesis. After he earned his master's, Johnson moved to St. Louis, formed Integration LLC with partners Joe Hartman and Robert Beckermann in 2002, and set out to make his vision a reality. "It worked out nicely, because what was my thesis almost ended up being my business plan," he says.

Granted, rewriting history wasn't as easy as writing a college thesis.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, the midtown neighborhood was known as Automotive Row, a destination where car dealerships and auto-parts stores lined Locust Street and people swarmed the nearby theater district. Over time, though, the same vehicles that brought the area prosperity carried citizens to the county, as more people commuted to work. Car dealers followed, purchasing inexpensive swaths of land to the west for surface parking lots. The last dealership left Auto Row in the '60s, and a large area to the south remained barren following the demolition of the Mill Creek Valley neighborhood. With downtown dying and Grand Center seemingly in its final act, the neighborhood deteriorated throughout the '70s and '80s.

When Roger Vincent moved M&M Forklift Motor Repair into 3101 Locust in 1990, the area was mostly abandoned. He recalls regularly seeing winos and broken car windows in front of his building. At Food Outreach on Olive Street, workers used to buzz in clients for safety reasons. More than a decade later, when photographer Rob Grimm purchased the building that now houses Tork Design, he recalls, "There was a very small number of businesses that came in here during the day, hunkered down behind locked doors, and then left at night. It was a desolate area."

In 2003, Eric and Mary Thoeke were searching for a place to move their Laeclde's Landing marketing firm, TOKY Branding + Design, when they stopped in midtown. "It was the Wild West," Eric recalls. "It was raw." While peering through the window at Integration's newly renovated headquarters, they saw Johnson peering back. The young architect explained his ambitious plans for the neighborhood, and the Thoelkes purchased a building there the next week.

Like those to come, the creative couple found the building's scale—and price—attractive. "It's not like Washington [Avenue]," explains Thoeke, who hired Integration to

renovate the firm's offices for about \$450,000. "These are smaller buildings, so it's much more affordable."

Shortly after TOKY moved into the neighborhood, a restaurant next door went out of business. The Thoelkes called Mary's brother, Mark Wegmann, now principal of Wegmann Companies, a real-estate development firm based in Illinois that does most of its business in midtown. "We had some conversations with a land planner," recalls Wegmann. "He was amazed that the quality of the neighborhood adjacent to a major university in a city the size of St. Louis existed, much less that it was available at a reasonable price and that large chunks could be purchased."

Other midtown pioneers also recognized the area's potential. Erich Kollinger transformed an old Cadillac dealership at 3224 Locust into luxury lofts. Grimm cleared out clutter inside 3005 Locust and reinvented the space as Tork Design downstairs and Grimm Photography upstairs. To address panhandlers in the area, Grimm approached The Salvation Army's Harbor Light Center homeless shelter. "To be honest, when I first bought the building, I was very leery of the Harbor Light," he recalls. "In the last few years, they have become a great neighbor."

Around the same time that Grimm and others were planting seeds of change, SLU began amassing property near Grand Center for its new basketball arena. The university quietly purchased dozens of plots within a three-block radius east of Grand Boulevard before breaking ground south of Olive Street in 2006. As for those properties to the north, many historic buildings remain vacant. A surface parking lot stretches across 3401 Locust, where a livery stable and Salisbury Motor Company once sat. Yet other buildings eventually were sold to savvy entrepreneurs.

In 2005, the National Register of Historic Places recognized a 2½-block stretch along Locust Street as the Locust Street Automotive District, which meant entrepreneurs could apply for tax credits to rehab historic buildings. Around that time, Johnson formed architectural consulting firm Renaissance Development Associates, and Wegmann gathered a group to invest more than \$30 million in the area. "I think when you have that kind of focus and those dollars behind Jassen's dream, it made it reasonable to move forward," Wegmann says.

With the help of brownfield tax credits, Integration renovated the Dinks Parrish

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## REAL ESTATE

Laundry building, a sizeable two-story with a terra-cotta facade on the south side of Olive Street, and filled it with the Linen Lofts, the Loft Jazz Club, and stir-fry restaurant Santo Bento, in which Wegmann was an investor. While the nightclub and lofts remain today, the eatery eventually shuttered. "It was before its time," says Wegmann.

Radio personality Joy Grdnic Christensen was looking to start a restaurant of her own when she came to midtown. "You'd look on the outside, and it was all boarded up," she recalls, "and you'd go inside, and it was amazing." With no prior restaurant experience, she bought a former car showroom at 3037 Locust and began the painstaking process of transforming the interior into a '30s-inspired café.

When The Fountain on Locust finally opened in 2008, it was joined by the wildly successful Pappy's Smokehouse and Buffalo Brewing Company on Olive Street. Other midtown eateries soon followed: The Good Pie, Triumph Grill, and The U. Where restaurants were scarce only five years earlier, a host of popular dining spots suddenly inhabited the neighborhood.

Lured to midtown by the affordable space and growing business community, firms like Elder and Associates and Clarion Marketing & Advertising migrated to the area. Fubar and EXO joined the night-life scene. For residents of nearby condos, there was Anatomy of Style, Invidia Salon & Spa, and Urban Tan. And firms like Touchwood Creative, Spoke Marketing, and 4 Alarm Studio joined the likes of TOKY.

Then there were the smaller things. "When you're in the trenches every day, you have these milestones," says Johnson. "I remember the first time I saw a group of bicyclists go by, or the first mother pushing a baby carriage."

Last July, former journalist Patrick Thimangu opened Arch Taekwondo in the lower level of the Beck Building, where Renaissance now houses its offices. After searching the city for a location, he met with Johnson and found the private atmosphere and high ceilings ideal for a martial-arts school. So far, he says, most of his clients have discovered the business via the Web, but he plans to market it to students at SLU and Harris-Stowe.

"It's still a challenge," he admits, "because what people remember about midtown is what was there 15 years ago."

**S**lowly, that perception is changing—though with plenty of help.

Take, for instance, the term "Midtown Alley." The Locust Business District already had dubbed the area "historic Auto Row," but that name didn't quite span those businesses south of Olive, nor did it have the cachet of "the Loop" or "the Grove." So Johnson and Wegmann met with TOKY and Touchwood to create a phrase that would capture the neighborhood spirit they hoped to achieve. "We wanted something that could be utilized from a marketing perspective that would catch people's ear or eye," says Wegmann. Finally, the firms arrived at a phrase that alluded to the neighborhood's legacy but wasn't tied to the past: Midtown Alley, or the Alley for short. "It has to be a name that people walk around with," says Thoeke. (While many locals have embraced the term, he admits some are more resistant.)

Last September, neighborhood businesses sponsored the inaugural Midtown Street Fest to raise awareness about the area and funds for Food Outreach. Nearly every one of the new businesses—from Pappy's to Arch Taekwondo—pitched in. "All of these people really want this thing to go," says Thoeke, "so it's easy to get people excited when everybody feels like they've got skin in the game."

As for marketing the area, Locust Business District executive director Katie Kappel explains, "It has to be district-wide," which can prove difficult for an area that stretches all the way east to 18th Street. Still, the business district is helping in other ways, such as providing security, sidewalks, and facade lighting, as well as a new rental-assistance program. "It really does have a lot of different businesses," says Kappel. "It's not completely an entertainment district."

Nonetheless, some believe Midtown Alley can evolve into just that. "The goal is, two to three years from now, when you walk down Locust Street, this will all be storefronts," says Wegmann, adding that the district is bringing in professional firms, too.

"What SLU doesn't have is a Loop," says Thoeke. "All the people who are coming in here see this thing five or 10 or 20 years from now, and they remember the way the Loop was in the '80s, and they look at it now and can envision SLU's kids having that kind of facility within walking distance of campus."

And there it is again: the Loop.

"I'd hazard to guess we have as many or more restaurants as the Loop has right now,"

says Wegmann. (Not quite—at press time, Midtown Alley boasted seven, versus 30-plus in the Loop.) "The difference is the walkability and other shops, which is what we need to bring in now." Finding a way to make Olive Street more pedestrian-friendly is part of that equation, he says.

"Now, what the Loop doesn't have that we have is 40,000 people working within a mile," says Wegmann. (While there is Clayton, Wegmann asserts many workers there frequent businesses within walking distance.) Which brings us to the economic engines of St. Louis' universities. "They've got Wash. U.," he says, "and we've got Saint Louis U."

SLU certainly welcomes the idea. "We are tremendously underserved right around us," says Kathleen Brady, SLU's vice-president for facilities management and civic affairs. "We don't have the advantage—like Wash. U. does with the Loop or where the [Wash. U.] med school is on Euclid—where you can walk to a lot of places off campus."

As for those remaining SLU-owned properties in the area? "We still own a couple buildings on Locust and Olive that we're looking to partner on, given the right opportunity," says Brady. In December, the *St. Louis Business Journal* reported that SLU is partnering with Lawrence Group co-founder Steve Smith to create a boutique hotel near Smith's previous project, Triumph Grill and the Moto Museum. Perhaps such a hotel could be midtown's equivalent of the Loop's Moonrise—sans the giant moon on top.

The vibe of Midtown Alley is also such that it jibes with a vast age range. The key ingredient: Those artsy types at local marketing firms and photo studios. "If you have SLU students sitting in Pappy's next to a corporate guy from downtown," explains Johnson, "and all of a sudden you put a couple creatives next to him, everybody feels comfortable."

As for entertainment, where the Loop has The Pageant and Tivoli Theatre, midtown has nearby Grand Center and the Moolah Theatre. And Chaifetz Arena and Robert R. Hermann Stadium are steady draws for sports fans. Wegmann hopes to connect it all with a trolley, which he's currently looking to fund. Sound familiar?

Of course, there is one big difference between the Loop and midtown: residents. Whereas U. City is flush with historic homes and nearby apartments, midtown has a handful of condo and apartment buildings like the PW Shoe Lofts and Drake Plaza

Apartments. And the closest residential neighborhood lies north of Delmar Boulevard, says Jeff-Vander-Lou.

"I personally believe this district needs homeownership and for-sale product to stabilize it more," says Brady, adding that it's difficult to sustain retail when students and faculty are gone for practically four months of the year. "I think the question's gonna be, 'Over time, how much of it stays student housing?'" For those rental properties that are converted, she speculates it will be "your condos and empty nesters and maybe even artsy people."

Liz Zempel, a realtor with Duffe-Nuernberger Realty, is confident the home factor will take care of itself. "When you're moving things into a neighborhood that was an unknown, you have to have businesses or industry there before you can put the residential there if you're going to do mixed use," she says. "I think Jassen did it just right."

Johnson and Wegmann believe the key is collaboration. "Hopefully we can bring together all these groups—the Locust Business District, SLU, and Grand Center," says Wegmann, "and this area can really be something 18 to 24 months from now."

And in the long run? Again, Wegmann compares it to Delmar Boulevard. "What was the Loop when the Loop started? It used to go to Skinker. Then it jumped over Skinker. Now we're talking about an East Loop."

Even the King of the Loop himself, Joe Edwards, recognizes the importance of reviving the central corridor. "That's what St. Louis really needs," he says. "It needs to be solid from, say, Ladue and Clayton to the Delmar Loop, Central West End, Grand Center, Locust and Olive, then downtown. Once that whole central corridor is stable, St. Louis will have rearrived—if there is such a phrase!"

Edwards' advice? Patience. "It took the Loop a long time to get stable, and then it took another decade to really blossom," he says.

Time—and the economy—will tell whether Midtown Alley lives up to its lofty comparison.

"We don't really have that single Joe Edwards here," admits Thaelke. "What we do have is a collection of people with different talents and agendas who are all working together to lift the area." 🏠

**JARRETT MEDLIN** is SLM's executive editor. A resident of the Central West End, he frequently drives the 2-mile route from his studio apartment to Pappy's and Triumph Grill—much to the detriment of his waistline.

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# **BUZZ**

**LIST**

**ST. LOUIS' MOST  
INFLUENTIAL  
PEOPLE, PLACES,  
ORGANIZATIONS  
AND IDEAS OF 2010.**

by **APRIL SEAGER**

**JENNIFER DULIN WILEY**

**JILL MANOFF**

**AMY DE LA HUNT**

**KRISTIN STEFEK BRASHARES**

**JENNIFER AULL**

**SHENIQUA FAULKNER**

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Art Direction by **DAVID HSIA**

Photo Assistants:

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Moira Dorsey of A Cut Above &  
Melissa Gonterman and

Casey Snell of Dominic Michael Salon

# MIDTOWN ALLEY

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## Jassen Johnson

31, PARTNER  
RENAISSANCE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATES

## Eric Thoelke

50, CREATIVE DIRECTOR/CO-OWNER  
TOKY BRANDING AND DESIGN

## Mary Thoelke

45, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS/CO-OWNER  
TOKY BRANDING AND DESIGN

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☛ Midtown Alley a next city neighborhood? Nah, it's definitely a *now* city neighborhood. The diverse and comprehensive development along Olive and Locust Streets between Grand Center and Downtown is now running at full throttle. In the 1920s, Locust Street, the main drag through Midtown Alley, became Automobile Row. The turf of historic auto houses then fell into a state of disrepair until 2002, when architect and developer Johnson and his team cut the first ribbon. Since then, their efforts, along with those of fellow longtime Midtowners like Food Outreach and TOKY, have turned the area into a magnet for new businesses. "It's urban, but it's intimate—you can hear yourself think here," said Eric, whose team at TOKY developed the branding for Midtown Alley and did much of its marketing. "We knew it was an area we'd enjoy growing up with," said Mary, who works with the Locust Business District to promote the area. The ever-growing group of businesses opening up there—from restaurants (Triumph Grill, The Fountain, The Good Pie, The U, Pappy's Smokehouse, Buffalo Brewing Co.) to creative agencies (Touchwood, Spoke) to boutiques and fitness centers (Anatomy of Style, Rock Gym)—continue to make it a Midtown hub. Up next in the Alley (should Eric and Mary get their wishes): a tattoo parlor and a bike shop; meanwhile, Johnson is cruising for a Chinese eatery. —April Seager



THANKS FOR THE BUZZ.  
 NOW LET US RETURN THE FAVOR.



FROM ALL OF US IN MIDTOWN ALLEY, THANKS FOR HELPING US MAKE ALIVE'S BUZZ LIST!

**FOOD & DRINKS**

Buffalo Brewing Co.  
 Dante's & Art Bar  
 EXO Restaurant & Lounge  
 The Fountain on Locust  
 FUBAR  
 The Good Pie  
 The Loft Jazz Club  
 NEO on Locust  
 Pappy's Smokehouse  
 The "U"  
 Triumph Grill  
 Vito's Pizzeria

**BUSINESSES & SERVICES**

American Automotive  
 Barnard Stamp Company  
 Elder & Associates, CPA  
 Food Outreach  
 Jeff Vanderlou Initiative  
 Kincaid Medical Associates  
 Metro Sign  
 Sigma-Aldrich  
 Schneider Industries  
 St. Louis For Kids  
 TLW and Associates  
 Wells Fargo Advisors

**CREATIVITY & CONCEPTS**

Art Partners: Dubinsky,  
 Forgelman, Marcus and Sprague  
 CK Design  
 Clarion Marketing  
 Cofactor Genomics  
 FK Photography  
 Four Alarm  
 Guarantee Interiors  
 Gauthier Gallery  
 Jupiter Studios  
 Lamar Advertising  
 Luxury Imports  
 Moto Museum  
 The Nu Art Series

Renaissance Development  
 Rob Grimm Photography  
 Satori Gallery & Performance Art  
 Spoke  
 TOKY Branding + Design  
 Tork Furniture Design  
 Touchwood

**LIFE & STYLE**

Anatomy of Style Boutique  
 Arch Taekwondo  
 Invidia Salon  
 Rock Workout  
 Urban Tan

**HOME & HEARTH**

3214 Locust Condos  
 Beck Building Condos  
 The Drake Plaza Apartments  
 Faberge Lofts  
 The Linen Lofts  
 The Lofts at 3224 Locust  
 PW Shoe Lofts  
 REO Lofts

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# HOME

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HOME & HEARTH

LIFE & STYLE

BUSINESS & SERVICES

CREATIVITY & CONCEPTS



### Music! Art! Food!

The 2nd Annual Midtown Alley Street Fest on Friday, August 20, 2010 was a huge success. Thanks to all who came out to the best Happy Hour of the summer!

We look forward to seeing you next summer at the 3rd Annual Midtown Alley Street Fest. Details coming soon!

[Click here to view photos](#)



Map of Area



Join Us

### Midtown Alley in the News!



March 2010  
[stltoday.com](#)

Subject: Hip 'Hoods: Midtown Alley is Rockin'

March 2010  
[St. Louis Magazine](#)

Subject: Midtown Revival

February 2010  
[ALIVE](#)  
Subject: The Buzz List

November 2009  
[ALIVE](#)  
Subject: Food Outreach and EXO

July 2009  
[St. Louis Magazine](#)  
Subject: Triumph Grill

April 2008  
[Sauce Magazine](#)  
Subject: Pappy's Smokehouse

January 2008  
[ALIVE](#)  
Subject: TOKY Branding & Design

[Urban Living Midtown](#)  
Subject: Chic Townhouse

February 2010  
[St. Louis Magazine](#)  
Subject: The Good Pie and Pappy's Smokehouse

January 2010  
[ALIVE](#)  
Subject: Rock Workout

September 2009  
[The Riverfront Times](#)  
Subject: Best of St. Louis (The U, Pappy's Smokehouse, The Good Pie, and The Fountain on Locust)

June 2009  
[St. Louis Magazine](#)  
Subject: The Good Pie

June 2007  
[The River front Times](#)  
Subject: Rebuilt to Suit

September 2006  
[The River front Times](#)  
Subject: Best Old Building (Dinks Parrish Laundry - The Linen Loft)

### New to the Neighborhood

**St. Louis For Kids**  
509 Garrison  
[www.stlouis4kids.org](http://www.stlouis4kids.org)

**Kincaid Medical Associates**  
3016 Locust, Suite 104  
[www.drrosakincaid.com](http://www.drrosakincaid.com)

**Cofactor Genomics**  
3139 Olive  
[www.cofactorgenomics.com](http://www.cofactorgenomics.com)

**Gatlin Racing**  
Motorcycle Performance Products  
3115 Locust  
[www.gatlinracing.com](http://www.gatlinracing.com)

### Coming Soon...

**Urban Chestnut Brewing Company**  
Micro Brewery and Restaurant  
3229 Washington  
[www.urbanchestnut.com](http://www.urbanchestnut.com)

**Pita Pit Fresh**  
Thinking/Healthy Eating  
3019 Olive  
[www.pitapit.com](http://www.pitapit.com)

**212 Signature Salon**  
511 Garrison Ave.

**Bandido's**  
Mexican Tappas  
3120 Olive St.

**Double Apple Café & Hookah**  
3134 Olive St.  
[www.doubleapplecafe.com](http://www.doubleapplecafe.com)

**Fieldhouse**  
Sports Bar & Grill  
511 N. Theresa Ave.  
[www.fieldhousetl.com](http://www.fieldhousetl.com)

**Hotel Ignacio**  
Boutique Hotel  
3407 Olive  
[www.hotelignaciostl.com](http://www.hotelignaciostl.com)

**PLUSH**  
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[www.plushstlouis.com](http://www.plushstlouis.com)

Midtown Alley is an exciting new neighborhood in the city of St. Louis that's really not new at all. From the 1920s until World War II, this area was known as automobile row. The historic significance of the area was recognized in 2005 when it was added to the National Register of Historic Places, as the Locust Street Automotive District.

Midtown Alley's "engine" is the 3000 block of Locust Street but cruises all the way from Theresa Avenue to the west, Leffingwell to the east, and Highway 40 to the south. After sitting idle for years, the neighborhood is revved up with new life from businesses, restaurants, galleries, shops and lofts. Many buildings are the work of famed architect, Preston Bradshaw, and showcase beautiful design and detail. Come to Midtown Alley and discover the historic neighborhood that's on the fast track to becoming St. Louis' newest hot spot.

Many buildings are the work of famed architect, Preston Bradshaw, and showcase beautiful design and detail. Come to Midtown Alley and discover the historic neighborhood that's on the fast track to becoming St. Louis' newest hot spot.

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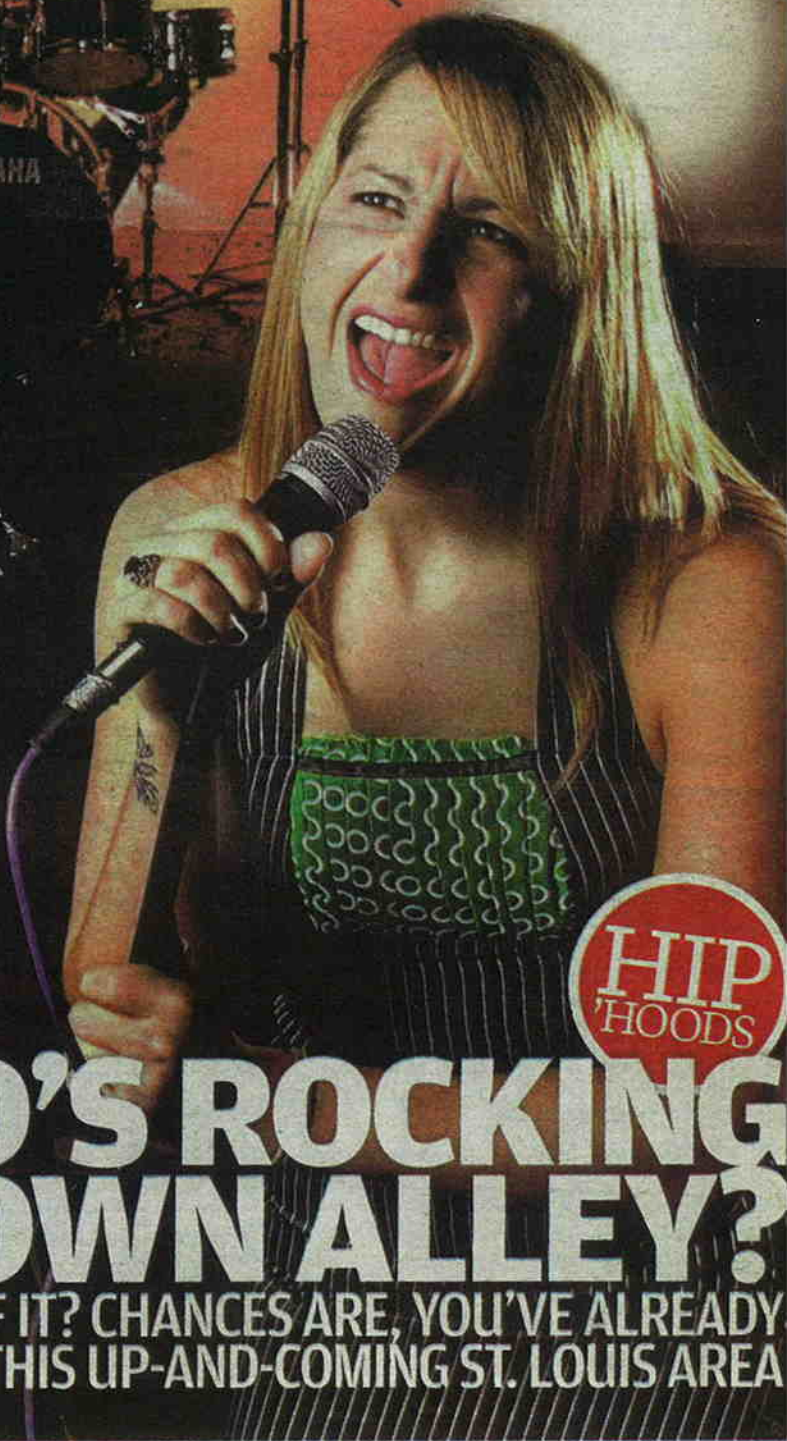
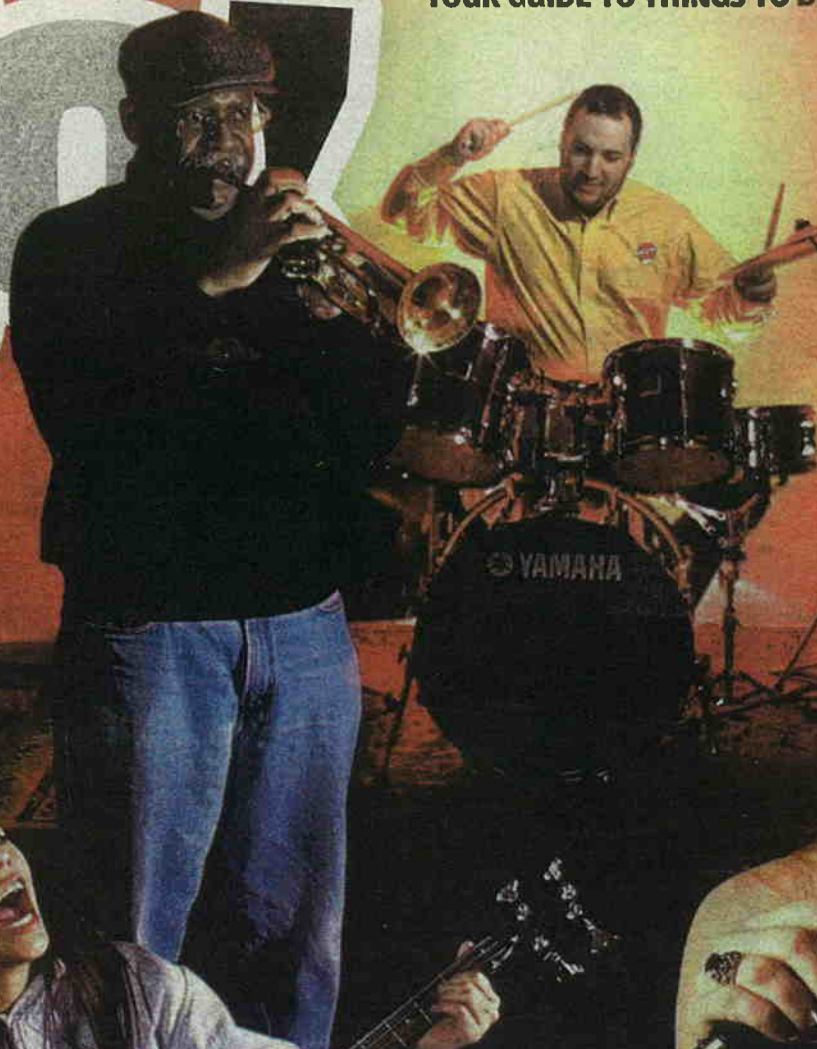
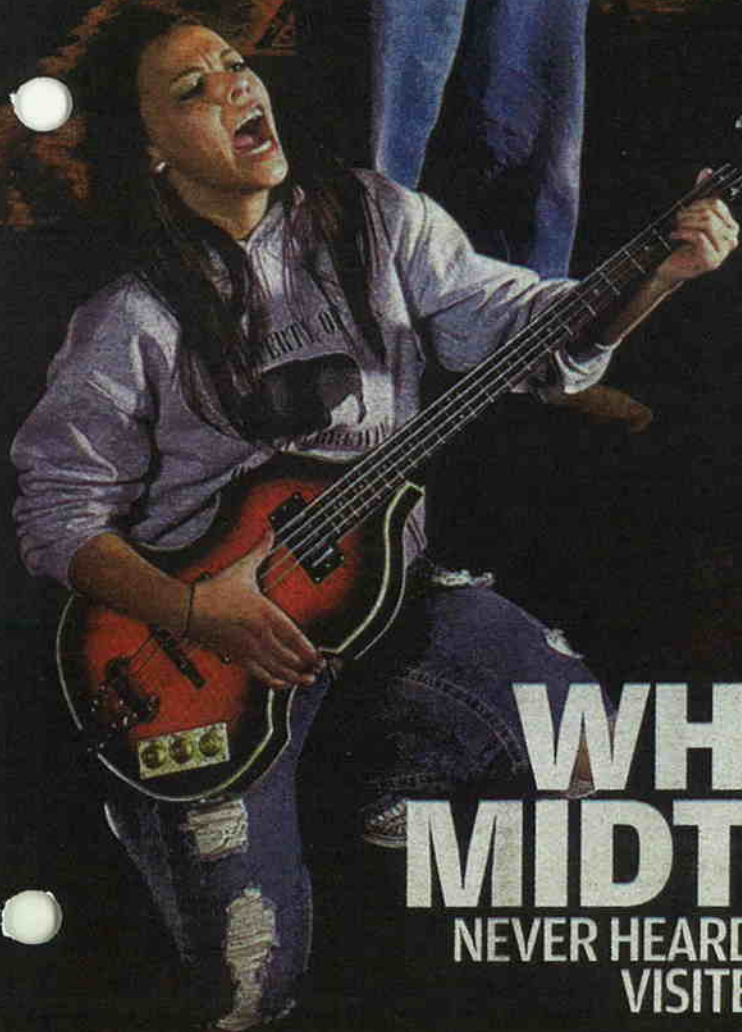


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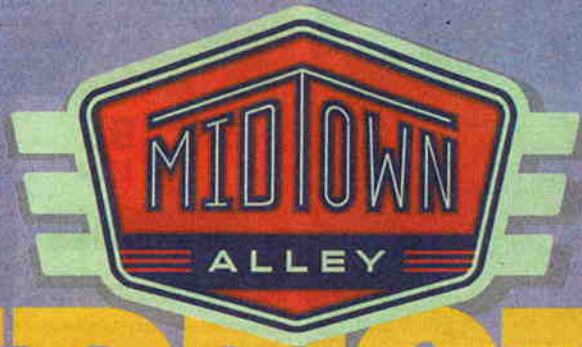
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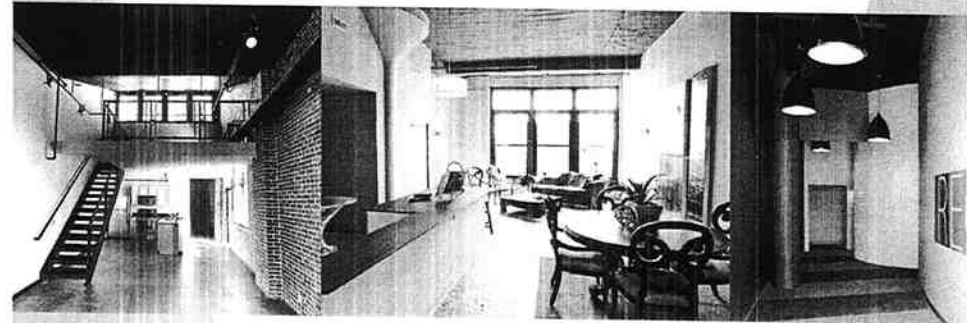
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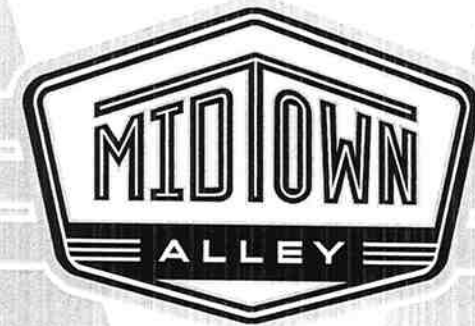
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