

A New Landscape

Alliance effort draws a young, creative workforce to university neighborhood

In 2000, University Park was facing problems similar to those confronting other neighborhoods near urban universities. More than half of the households were living below poverty level and the area had a disproportionately high crime rate.

Less than a decade later, a dramatic transformation is taking place in this Akron neighborhood.

The 50-block area surrounding The University of Akron is becoming a desirable place to live, work, shop and play. Through the efforts of city leaders, businesses and the university, the area boasts a burgeoning mixed-use environment for recreation, the arts, homes and business. University Park has become a pedestrian and bicycle friendly neighborhood with safer parks, neighborhoods and public areas.

The ambitious revitalization initiative is overseen by the University Park Alliance, which focuses its efforts on economic development, education and community engagement. Major funding is provided by a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Since its formation in 2001, UPA's efforts have helped bring more than 1,000 jobs and \$300 million in private investment to the neighborhood, which now boasts some 15,000 residents and 300 businesses.

The first phase of Spicer Village, a 25-unit townhome



A stairway reading area is part of the architectural styling of The Townhomes at Spicer Village in Akron's University Park.

■ livability



JEFF ADKINS

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BANDING TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY PARK ALLIANCE is a partnership among The University of Akron, city of Akron, Summa Health System, Akron Public Schools, Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority, *Akron Beacon Journal*, the Greater Akron Chamber and the University Park Development Corp.

To learn more about the University Park Alliance, visit www.upakron.com.

community, is under way, with a homeowner-incentive program for full-time university faculty and staff. Approval has been received for a new student housing project. Private investment is on the rise.

CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATION

Dr. Luis M. Proenza, Akron University president, has worked hard to transform the campus and is dedicated to making resources available to the community. Residents are given access to more than 300 low-cost or free events annually, including sports, theater, dance, concerts and fine-art exhibits.

An arts village is developing and expanding in University Park. Don Drumm Studios & Gallery features the works of more than 500 contemporary North American artists.

“As a longtime business operating in University Park, it is exciting to be a catalyst in the transformation of the neighborhood,” Drumm says. “We have a symbiotic relationship with the partners of University Park Alliance, and they

appreciate the artistic influence we have on the neighborhood.”

Future development near Don Drumm Studios & Gallery is expected to include sidewalk cafes, more galleries and additional retail.

UPA partners established The University Park Advantage: An Educational Excellence Initiative Program. Innovative experiences that enhance education at every grade level from pre-kindergarten through college are planned. A scholarship program has been established for long-term residents of University Park to attend The University of Akron.

Ken Stapleton, senior economic development adviser to Proenza and executive director of the alliance, is enthusiastic about the future.

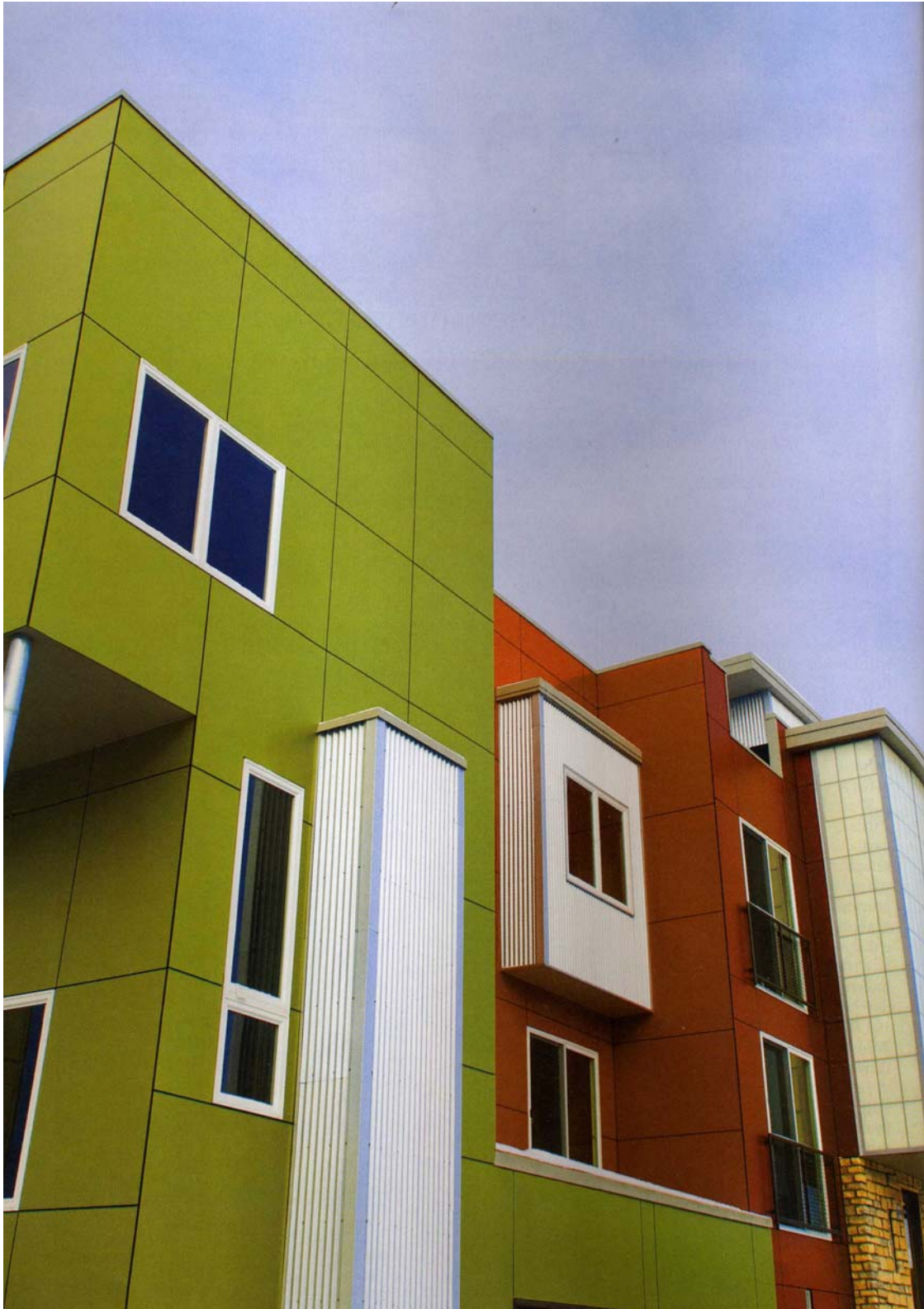
“We are actively working on projects with developers from Akron, Cleveland and California,” Stapleton says.

“Private investors understand the value of University Park,” he says, “including the shared vision, strong leadership and the momentum of the neighborhood’s transformation.”

– Claire Ratliff-Sears

Artist Don Drumm owns Don Drumm Studios & Gallery in Akron’s University Park neighborhood.

Continued



The Townhomes at Spicer Village in Akron's University Park