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News: Coming soon, Denver: Live music in a ... former mortuary?

By **THE DENVER POST** |  1 Comment



[1]

Developer Paul Tamburello has some fun on the roof of the former Olinger mortuary in Denver's Lower Highland neighborhood. Tamburello envisions the spot as a place where neighborhood residents can enjoy live music, movies and other activities. (Judy DeHaas, The Denver Post)

By Margaret Jackson

Denver developer Paul Tamburello is starting the next phase of redevelopment of the old Olinger mortuary in Denver's Lower Highland neighborhood.

Tamburello and partner Stephanie Garcia paid \$2.1 million for the remainder of the Olinger mortuary complex at West 30th Avenue and Tejon Street, where they plan to build out space for restaurants and shops. Several years ago, Tamburello and Garcia redeveloped the portion of the complex where restaurants Lola and Vita are located.

Tamburello intends to create a plaza between the two buildings around the giant milk can housing Little Man Ice Cream. He envisions the complex as a gathering place for the neighborhood and intends to use the plaza space for live music, movies and other activities.

“We see this as animating and improving what’s happening here in the community,” he said. “We want to fulfill our goal of being a positive influence on the neighborhood.”

He already has a restaurant lined up to occupy about half of the 18,650-square-foot building’s second floor. Tamburello declined to name the chef or reveal the concept, but plans include a huge rooftop patio beneath the giant Olinger sign.

Several other restaurateurs have expressed interest in the space, Tamburello said. He is also talking with a prospective tenant about opening an upscale jazz club.

The 7,800-square-foot street level could be divided to accommodate two tenants.

“Our dream tenant would be a market to take the whole space,” Tamburello said.

A concept similar to Cook’s Fresh Market on the 16th Street Mall would be ideal, he said.

“They could have outside seating,” he said.

Unable to get a bank loan, Tamburello and Garcia secured private financing for the project. Tamburello declined to name the investors but said they have financed other projects in the neighborhood.

Restaurant consultant John Imbergamo said he was skeptical about the first phase of the complex’s redevelopment but that it has proved to be a home run.

“I looked at the lower part before (Tamburello) leased it to Lola and Vita and Karma, and I had a hard time getting past the mortuary part, mostly because it looked like a mortuary,” Imbergamo said. “I thought Lola was the perfect tenant for that property. They had a brand built, and people knew who they were. There was no risk to go to Lola.

“Now that that whole corner has become as hot as it is, I think the up-the-hill space is a better piece of property because you can put a rooftop restaurant up there and it’s 35 to 40 feet higher,” he said. “I think it’s a spectacular restaurant space.”


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