



## For the River District, it's gritty to glamorous



PARTY CONCIERGE, 10TH STREET: Lawrence and Susan Crane, co-owners of The Party Concierge, have weathered a fire that struck their business last year. "We love the River District," Susan Crane says

### ROAD, LIGHT-RAIL, LINKS AID INFLUX OF BUSINESS

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More than a century ago, what is now known as Sacramento's River District was known for flooding.

In the 1930s, it was known for canning. Later, it became a gritty mix of working factories and derelict buildings, close to downtown but isolated and often forgotten.

But now, the 830-acre district north of the historic railyard and Sacramento's downtown core is seeing an influx of residential, office and commercial land-use projects.

In recent years, a new road and a light-rail extension have provided better connection to the rest of the city. More than \$450 million has been invested in the district through public and private projects, bringing along more than 1,000 new jobs.

Patty Kleinknecht, executive director of the River District nonprofit association representing business and property owners, said the area's transformation has been the result of a "genuine partnership" among businesses, developers, transportation officials, government leaders and urban planners.

"Particularly over the last five years, we've seen smart growth, mixed-use development close to the business center of our region, with easy access to a lot of different forms of transportation," Kleinknecht said.

Long-established companies still dot the area, including the venerable Blue Diamond Growers cooperative, dating back to 1910. But recent arrivals have been numerous, adding a modern vibe to the district.

They include the California Lottery headquarters building, an imposing structure with curving exterior lines, hundreds of square feet of blue glass and aluminum, and LED lighting.

Inside the building, food truck operator Krush Burger opened a brick-and-mortar restaurant late last year.

The Party Concierge, the special event services/amenities business whose facilities burned in an August 2012 fire, has reopened nearby in a 42,000-square-foot building at 601 N. 10th St. The significantly upgraded building features modern architectural touches inside and out, including ceiling-high windows letting in natural light.

Last year, a new light-rail station opened at Seventh Street and Richards Boulevard. The open-air brick-and-metal structure, topped by a Township 9 sign that lights up at night, has the look of a train stop in a European capital.

The station borders the 65-acre Township 9 mixed-use development site, where construction continues on the Cannery Place Apartments, a 180-unit, \$40 million development that also will include retail. Construction is expected to be completed in October next year.

Steve Goodwin, president of the River District board of directors and Township 9, uses the word "momentum" repeatedly when describing the area.

"That's momentum ... from more employment, more businesses, more services and more investment," he said.

Goodwin remembers a different time, when the decades-old Tri-Valley Growers cannery was being readied for the wrecking ball, clearing space for Township 9 work.

"We've been here for about 14 years now, and back then, well, it was kind of a dump. It was considerably more blighted," he said. "There was a lot yet to be done. It was really in its infancy in terms of its redevelopment."

Numerous projects, including a widening of Richards Boulevard, altered the district, but Goodwin points to the Seventh Street extension project, completed in March 2004, as the key milestone.

"That connected downtown with the district, and that was very important. Before that, we were sort of on an island. But that Seventh Street punch-through changed everything."

Goodwin praised the city of Sacramento: "The city has been great. They really helped move the pieces that needed to be moved in the right direction, with grant dollars and everything else.

"A lot of people like to criticize the city, but when you look at everything that has been done (in the River District), it represents years of advance planning and hard work."

**Steve Cohn**, Sacramento City Council member for District 3, which includes the River District, noted that the area's long history has been filled with up and downs, including businesses upset with riverside campers and crowds of homeless at Loaves & Fishes, the in-district charity.

But now, Cohn says, the district is taking on a distinctive look: "There's so much going on, and you have to remember that it has been an industrial site for years, and therefore was kind of neglected. ... Now and looking at the future, we're really seeing this transformation from industrial to mixed use in a very desirable environment that doesn't ignore the rivers."

Township 9 is a joint project of Sacramento-based Nehemiah Corp. of America and Sacramento developers Goodwin and Ron Mellon.

Not surprisingly, Goodwin considers Township 9's long-term development – a potential \$2 billion enterprise – as a capstone for the River District, with a planned mix of housing, **office space** and retail: "Township 9 was catalytic from the beginning, coming in to create something different than what anybody expected to be built out here."

Beyond development dollars, grants and new construction, Goodwin says the River District has more down-to-earth things going for it: "The **business owners** all know each other, like each other and respect each other. It's always been a fun place to do a development like this."

Lawrence and Susan Crane, co-owners of The Party Concierge, couldn't agree more.

"We love the River District," said Susan Crane. "For sure, they've made us feel like family. Even after the fire (last year) and when we were working out of trailers waiting to move into this building, we knew we wanted to stay in this location."

Susan Crane said River District officials surprised her last week with an impromptu welcome-back party, complete with confetti: "That's the kind of people they are, welcoming us back to the neighborhood."

Lawrence Crane said the River District offers other advantages: "The Sacramento area is our hub, so we want to be here. But we're just outside the hub of downtown, and we have a little more room to spread out. And we're close to (interstate) highways and the airport. We can get to places all over Sacramento within minutes."

In their sizable office space, the Cranes have enough room for an on-site warehouse, a loading dock and delivery truck parking under cover. They also have space to create acres of spectacular balloon/floral displays and giant props for events ranging from birthdays to opulent corporate gatherings.

One of The Party Concierge's showpieces is a robotic device named Michelangelo, capable of carving large, detailed, three-dimensional artwork from foam, ice, plastic or wood.

Even the McDonald's at 200 Richards Blvd. is part of the River District revival.

Restaurant owner/operator Ray Gallo Jr., has completed a \$1 million makeover and just last week instituted 24/7 service at the drive-thru window.

"Business has been great, so yeah, we want to step in and get some of that late-night business," Gallo said. "I see the area growing, and when I think about what's up the road in the future, I'm on cloud nine."

What does the future hold for the district? Plenty, according to groups seeking financing for various projects.

The proposals include more street improvements, upgraded bicycle access and new neighborhoods. Longer term, development of the railyard will fill in the major gap between the district and downtown. And new and enhanced crossings over both the Sacramento and American rivers are in the works, including a new I Street Bridge that is well into the planning stages. A bridge over the **American River** to Natomas is still in the conceptual stages.

## **SACRAMENTO'S RIVER DISTRICT AT A GLANCE**

**The area:** An 830-acre city district just north of Sacramento's downtown core, with roots dating back to the dawn of the transcontinental railroad. Today, it includes a mix of residential, office and commercial land uses. Oversight: The district has its own nonprofit association representing business and property owners, plus an association board of directors.

**District digs:** The district is home to long-standing firms, including Blue Diamond Growers (dating back to 1910), General Produce Co. (1933) and Capital Machine Corp. (1936). Recent arrivals include a new Greyhound bus station, the California Lottery headquarters, a California Highway Patrol headquarters, a brick-and-mortar Krush Burger restaurant and special event services/amenities provider The Party Concierge.

**Quick history:** Levees built along the bordering Sacramento and American rivers opened the district up to warehouse development, with agriculture products shipped via rivers, rails and roads at the turn of the 20th century. In 1928, the California Cooperative Producers Co. built a tomato cannery on North Seventh Street. In 1931, Tom Richards and brothers Peter and Henry Bercut bought into it, and the Bercut-Richards Packing Co. was the region's largest producer of tomato products. In the 1940s-50s, more businesses and housing were constructed. The area was annexed to the city of Sacramento in the 1950s and early 1960s.

**Ties to the past:** The old Bercut-Richards cannery went under the wrecking ball in June 2010, making way for the Township 9 development of residences, offices and stores. The light-rail station on Richards Boulevard at Seventh Street includes materials from the old cannery. An apartment complex being built just north of the station is scheduled to open in October 2014, with the name Cannery Place Apartments.

**More info:** [www.riverdistrict.net](http://www.riverdistrict.net) or (916) 321-5599.

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