



Sacramento's newest urban hot spot is, well, old – and loving it



The River District's recent transformation includes the gleaming California Lottery headquarters on North 10th Street. **José Luis Villegas** jvillegas@sacbee.com

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By Mark Glover mglover@sacbee.com

The once-gritty warehouse district – known long ago as a perpetual flooding ground at the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers – has seen a renaissance of significant proportions.

More than \$500 million in public/private investments and more than 1,000 new jobs will do that. So will a shiny light-rail station and a Seventh Street connector linking the 830-acre district and Sacramento's downtown core.

I REMEMBER WHEN IT WAS ONE LANE EACH WAY ON RICHARDS BOULEVARD. A DOG COULD CROSS RICHARDS BOULEVARD WITHOUT GETTING HIT.

[Fred Pleines Jr., one of the Yellow Cab co-owners who sold the business to new owners in 2014](#)

The River District's recent transformation includes the gleaming California Lottery headquarters building, a relocated Greyhound bus station and the reopening of The Party Concierge, the special event services/amenities business whose facilities burned in a 2012 fire. The most recent arrival is Vintage Monkey, a decidedly contemporary motorcycle service, repair, retail store and cafe along Sacramento's busy North 16th Street corridor.

Yet amid the modern development – which also includes the Township 9 project of apartments, town houses, condominiums, offices and retail – the district is sending out another message: We haven't forgotten our roots, which run deep.

The district is home to numerous long-standing local firms. They include Blue Diamond Growers, dating back to 1910; General Produce Co., started in 1933; Capital Machine Corp., launched in 1936; Schetter Electric, which will turn 60 next year; Capital Sheet Metal, established in 1945; Power Brake Sales, set up

in 1948; and Sacramento Theatrical Lighting, which will mark its 70th anniversary this year.

And then there's Yellow Cab Co. of Sacramento on Richards Boulevard. The taxi company traces its local origins back to 1917.

"We're an emerging district with a lot of new things happening ... but when I started looking at it more closely, I was surprised to see how many long-term businesses were celebrating (milestone) anniversaries last year, this year and next year," said Patty Kleinknecht, executive director of the River District nonprofit association representing business and property owners.

Kleinknecht believes the district's mix of old and new enterprises has it nicely positioned as an urban hot spot.

THE DISTRICT'S OCCUPANTS INCLUDE YELLOW CAB CO., WHICH TRACES ITS LOCAL ORIGINS BACK TO 1917, AND VINTAGE MONKEY, A CONTEMPORARY MOTORCYCLE SERVICE, REPAIR, RETAIL STORE AND CAFE THAT OPENED IN NOVEMBER.

"With the development of Township 9, the railyards, the Golden 1 Center, a proposed Major League Soccer stadium and a number of other projects in various stages of development, the River District is becoming integrated into the Sacramento central city as an eclectic neighborhood that will connect people to housing, jobs and recreation," she said. "Its transition will welcome new development as it celebrates businesses with strong roots in the Sacramento economy."

Business operators whose firms have long operated in the district cited advantages that included location, community support and a sense of history.

"Blue Diamond's founders chose this location more than 100 years ago due to the proximity to the railway and Delta," said Alicia Rockwell, spokeswoman for the almond grower cooperative that amassed record revenue of \$1.67 billion last year. "Even as almond growing has expanded to encompass the entire Central Valley, we have remained in this location throughout our history because of the strong bonds we have forged within the community and the continued support we have received."

Fred Pleines Jr., one of the Yellow Cab co-owners who sold the business to new owners in 2014, recalls the River District in simpler times: "I remember when it was one lane each way on Richards Boulevard. A dog could cross Richards Boulevard without getting hit."

His father, Frederick Pleines Sr., started driving taxis locally in 1938 at age 21.

THE RIVER DISTRICT IS BECOMING INTEGRATED INTO THE SACRAMENTO CENTRAL CITY AS AN ECLECTIC NEIGHBORHOOD THAT WILL CONNECT PEOPLE TO HOUSING, JOBS AND RECREATION. ITS TRANSITION WILL WELCOME NEW DEVELOPMENT AS IT CELEBRATES BUSINESSES WITH STRONG ROOTS IN THE SACRAMENTO ECONOMY.

Patty Kleinknecht, executive director of the River District nonprofit association representing business and property owners

Schetter Electric Inc. was founded in 1958 by Howard Schetter and originally operated on O Street in downtown Sacramento. At the close of the 1970s, the founder and his son, Frank Schetter, opted to move the company headquarters to Bannon Street in the River District, where they've operated ever since.

"We relocated Schetter to the River District and planted our roots here for (multiple) reasons," said Frank Schetter, who succeeded his father as head of the firm. "First was the ease of access to all the freeways and downtown. Second, as soon as we received the proposal to move our office to the River District, we realized it was an extremely underserved area with an immense amount of opportunity for growth."

John Cox, president of Sacramento Theatrical Lighting, moved to the River District in 1987, also citing the centralized transportation hub and the area's potential. "We do a lot of business in downtown, Cal Expo and the Bay Area, so easy freeway access was important. We also invested in the property because we believed it would become a prime area in the future. It's great to see it live up to its potential today."