



Things are Looking up Downtown

A rooftop patio had popped up atop the Ruhl and Ruhl building at the corner of Second and Cedar streets in downtown Muscatine.

MUSCATINE, Iowa — A rooftop garden patio is one of developer Tom Meeker's latest creative efforts to beautify and attract people to downtown Muscatine.

From the street below, trees and bushes can be seen growing on the roof of Ruhl&Ruhl Realtors, 226 E. Second St. The view from the rooftop patio provides a picturesque scene of the Mississippi River and the historical downtown buildings that line Second Street.

"It's a nice view and a peaceful location," Meeker said Wednesday from the patio surrounded by the living landscape that was installed by Kellor and Kellor Landscape Inc. of Muscatine.

Workers from Meekers Renovation, Tom Meeker's work crew, hauled 36 tons of dirt to the reinforced concrete roof, which Meekers said, was capable of holding the added weight plus more, and laid rock and patio pavers to create a walkway. A section with patio furniture will serve as a meeting place for employees from Ruhl & Ruhl and Allison Law Office, which is in a suite connected to the building.

The plants and trees will be watered with rain runoff that will be collected in a 280-gallon tank to conserve water.

"I want visitors to look up and say 'Wow, look at that,'" Meeker said proudly of the design. "It doesn't cost the city one penny to update downtown properties and the taxes increase. We attract people and the city benefits from it."

Together, Ruhl & Ruhl and Meeker and his wife, Ann Meeker, have invested more than \$300,000 to update and refurbish the property. The interior was remodeled and the exterior got a facelift last year.

Tom Meeker, 56, has developed multiple properties downtown, including Pearl Plaza and the Button Factory Woodfire Grille. Local investors contribute money, as do the Meekers.

The Ruhl & Ruhl building, formerly Downtown Variety and Ace Hardware, had office and storage space on its second floor. The crew from Meekers Renovation is remodeling the space with a two- and a three-bedroom, upscale apartment. The two apartments will have carpeted bedrooms, tiled floors, large bathrooms and access to the rooftop patio.

"We need to continue transforming downtown living with garages and we'll rent them all out," Meeker said. "Better quality living downtown makes our downtown more practical for business people. It's proven that a mixture of lower-cost and upper end living works."

Meeker said in recent years he's built about 20 similar-quality apartments and that they all stay full with renters of all ages. He said business people like to live downtown and it's been a goal of his for more than five years to continually update downtown living spaces.

"I always build it and hope they will come," Meeker said.

