

Flurry of building sales on south Ervay Street could bring big changes to Dallas' Cedars neighborhood

By [Steve Brown](#)

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The revitalization underway on the south side of downtown Dallas is spreading to the nearby Cedars neighborhood where buyers are repurposing old buildings for new uses.

Several buildings along south Ervay Street just south of Interstate 30 are changing hands to new owners that plan to remodel the properties for a variety of uses.

One of the largest properties in plan is a one-time Ford automotive dealership at 1601 Ervay that's being acquired by Dallas entrepreneur and arts advocate Claude Albritton III.

Albritton is co-owner of the McKinney Avenue Contemporary gallery, performance and arts center in Uptown.

The early 20th century brick buildings Albritton is buying in the Cedars will be remodeled and used for a variety of art exhibitions and performances.

"They are wonderful old buildings and really unlike anything else you could find near downtown," said real estate agent Candace Rubin, who's representing the owner of the property in a pending sale to Albritton.

The entire complex – formerly the Ben Griffin Ford dealership which closed in 1962 – takes up more than two acres at Ervay and Gano streets.

The Griffin Ford compound is the largest of several properties in the same area that are being sold.



A former ice cream plant at Ervay and Griffin streets has been bought by the Bowdon Foundation. (Steve Brown)

Cedars neighborhood businessman Zad Roumaya has the former Yellow Cab property across the street at 1610 Ervay under contract to purchase.

Roumaya plans to remodel the almost 40,000-square-foot, building into spaces for entrepreneurs, small businesses and start-up companies.

The building – which was constructed in 1945 as an auto parts and service center – has a large parking lot on the north side.

“The historic nature of these buildings has been one of the reasons my attraction,” said Roumaya, who built the nearby Buzz Lofts condo project on Akard Street. “Where else are you going to find something like this so close to downtown.

“I’ve done five building buildings on south Akard that are all fully occupied with small tenants,” he said.

With prices of property rising in the downtown area and with more than 1,000 apartments and townhouse now under construction at the Farmers Market, developers and investors are paying more attention to the nearby Cedars district.

“We are finally getting our due,” Roumaya said. “After working down here for 15 years, its always made sense to me.

“We are close to downtown and directly accessible,” he said. “The area is finally tipping, but it’s been a slow progression.”

Developer Jack Matthews, who restored the historic Sears Roebuck and Co. buildings on south Lamar Street, just opened a \$24 million 164-unit apartment community on Belleview Street just west of Ervay.

The apartments – which provide workforce housing – are already fully leased with a waiting list, Matthews confirms.

“We are very happily surprised,” Matthews said. “This project validates the need for more housing in the Cedars.

“The whole area is coming into its own.”

Matthews owns properties at Ervay and Blakeney where he plans more apartments and other developments.

Other new owners plan to remodel more buildings along Ervay Street.

The Bowdon Foundation just bought a former ice cream plant at Ervay and Griffin streets with plans to turn the building into creative workspaces, property owners in the area say.

The 3-story, 40,000-square-foot brick building was constructed in 1921 and once housed the Boedeker Manufacturing Co., which produced ice cream, butter and other dairy products.

The building has recently been occupied by Preferred Office Products which will move in about six months, said Robert Hernandez, Bowdon Foundation executive director.

“We were looking in the Design District and the negotiations fell through,” Hernandez said. “We came to look at the building and put an offer on it.”

Hernandez said the building will be “basically an art incubator.”

The property will be remodeled into artists studios, workshops, education facilities and display space.

“The top floor has a great view of downtown that we want to use for special exhibition space,” he said. “Probably by the end of 2015 we will have something up and running.”

More developments are in the works in the same area.

Dallas developer and investor Jim Lake is also negotiating to purchase the historic Ambassador Hotel at Ervay and St. Paul streets.

Lake – who's redeveloped building in the Design District and Oak Cliff – plans to restore the more than century old building, which is the oldest hotel in Dallas.

The Ambassador has been owned for 20 years by a Christian organization, Institute in Basic Life Principles.

Deep Ellum building owner and investor George Reeves is rebuilding a former printing company building at 1818 S. Ervay St. The 2-story brick building was constructed in 1924 for Lowden Printing.

By the end of the year the building will have 19 apartments plus storage space and a private dog park for residents.

Hershel Weisfeld has been investing in the area south of downtown for more than 20 years and says that Old City Park (now Dallas Heritage Village) has been an anchor for the district.

“That park has been a stronghold to help stabilize the neighborhood,” Weisfeld said.

Weisfeld said with all the emphasis on downtown Dallas, the “economics of crossing I-30 into the Cedars is a natural progression.

“We've seen the transition at the Farmers Market and at the South Side project on Lamar,” he said. “The economics of the Cedars makes sense, and what's happening is very exciting.

“Dallas no longer has a backside to downtown.”