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Taking shape

Star-Telegram

The dreams of those long-suffering souls who have patiently worked at sculpting a revitalized downtown Arlington are at last taking rock-solid form -- thanks in no small measure to a group of women who have been investing in the community for more than 25 years.

During the next two years, several developments should coalesce to bring new energy to old Arlington.

The city will demolish the TXU building across from City Hall at Abram and Center streets for a pocket park. The idea is that the park will feature an amphitheater and a nonstanding water fountain, the kind that children love to run through on hot summer days.

The city is applying for a Mortimer Levitt Foundation grant of \$250,000 that -- if approved as expected -- will be used to fund construction of the amphitheater. The pavilion will be a state-of-the-art design for outdoor concerts and a multitude of other community events.

A newly formed local group, Friends of the Levitt Pavilion Arlington, will be raising the rest of the money needed for construction. The city will build and maintain the park, which is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2008.

The Junior League of Arlington has given the city a \$100,000 gift -- to commemorate the nonprofit organization's 25th anniversary -- for the construction of the fountain. In its quarter-century of existence, the Junior League has put more than \$2 million into local charitable causes and has donated millions of hours of volunteer time.

Since 1998, the league has set aside 20 percent of the funds it has raised to pay for a lasting gift for the city. Members gave their blessing to the idea of a fountain, which was originally proposed for a site near the downtown library. Thank goodness the membership changed directions and agreed to put the fountain in this new park.

The City Council will see designs for the park and fountain in August.

Water is gold when trying to attract people to new or redeveloped sites. Commercial developers understand this. John Fregonese, the nationally known downtown redevelopment expert hired to study Arlington's center city prospects, acknowledged such, recommending that plans include a water feature.

Thanks to the Junior League, the city will have one.

Now if Arlington can just get that Babe's Chicken Restaurant up and running in a remodeled Johnnie High's Country Music Revue building. The restaurant's owners, Paul and Mary Beth "Babe" Vinyard, are negotiating to install a branch of their much-loved eatery at Center and Division streets by 2009.

Mix a popular restaurant with free concerts at a new pavilion and a fun, usable water fountain, and finally Arlington will have a genuine downtown.