



Students draw plans to renovate Martindale

by Marc Speir



Every semester since 1983, Nancy Granato's research and environmental design classes have taken on a "real-life" project to transform a building or an area of a city to benefit the community. Previous classes surveyed or remodeled such venues as homeless shelters, museums, retail stores and the Fire Station Studios.

Last fall, students tackled a different kind of project – a downtown. They created studio proposals to renovate downtown Martindale and its central artery, Main Street.

The water tower looming over Martindale provides a glimpse of the trade the town once boasted, now home to the skeletons of gins and abandoned businesses that thrived under the booming corn and cottonseed industries. Established 153 years ago, it would be an understatement to suggest the town 7 miles east of San Marcos is in need of a facelift.

In early December students presented proposals to town leaders, citizens, Mayor Patti Peterson and Carlton Carl, owner of the bulk of downtown Martindale, including seven buildings in need of renovation.

"Mr. Carl was beaming from ear to ear," said Granato, assistant professor of family and consumer sciences and coordinator of the interior design program. "He wanted to take all the plans, models and drawings with him."

Six of the seven buildings owned by Carl are currently unused and are charming, though in a state of stillness and decay, with only one building being rented out by a cabinetmaker. Nearby, the police department, city court and mayor's offices remain as the only major downtown fixtures in operation.

Students crafted 16 presentations for the remodeling showcase, two for each of seven buildings and two for the overall downtown scene. They used the opportunity to hone their skills and strengthen their portfolios.

"Having an actual site to work with and a real client who might use some of our ideas made the project much more meaningful," said Christina Prentice, senior from



San Marcos. “Having a client with real needs was challenging when it came time to make design decisions and considerations.”

Travis Witt used the project to pursue a love of landscape architecture. “I’ve gained a better understanding of native Texas plants,” said Witt, senior from Austin. “I think the world would benefit if more people chose to use native plants when landscaping.”

Carl, former vice president of communications for the American Association for Justice in Washington, D.C., flew in from the nation’s capital to hear the various suggestions offered by the groups to transform his 36,000 square feet of commercial building property. He is currently in the process of making Martindale his permanent home and recently accepted a position as CEO and executive publisher for the *Texas Observer*.

An inventory of Carl’s downtown holdings includes three empty general stores, a former bank, a cottonseed weigh station, several warehouses, a movie-set courtroom, an aquarium filled with cotton plants, a seed elevator, 16 seed silos and 300 feet of frontage on the San Marcos River.

Martindale is trying to reinvent its image in the hopes of drawing tourists, much like the artistic bed-and-breakfast cities of Salado and Gruene. Carl and city leaders want to restore the buildings to create a historic district, strengthen the local economy and keep a turn-of-the-century look to the town.

“We’re looking at other similar cities and seeing what worked and what didn’t,” Carl said. “We want to preserve the character of a small agriculturally based city to the extent possible but make it more attractive to visitors and the community.”



Texas State interior design student Christina Prentice, left, points out a detail of her downtown design while Kellye Adamo looks on.

Students working in teams conducted research into the history of the district and its buildings and created three-dimensional projects designed to promote the future of the Martindale, which is expected to grow from its current population of around 1,000 citizens. Evidence of expansion is seen as toll roads are built towards nearby Seguin and a number of residential developments are zoned near Martindale.

Proposals for the outdoor areas of the downtown district include innovations to landscaping, parking, paving materials, street lighting, wiring and the use of renewable or green-energy sources.

Witt and his group found low-cost, effective ways to add green space to Main Street.

“I learned how to place trees, bushes and grasses by size, color and the times that they bloom or produce fruit to create a cohesive landscape that looks beautiful during all seasons of the year,” Witt said. “My concept was to create points of interest for each seasonal change, yet also use plants that would be drought-, disease- and pest-resistant and virtually be maintenance free.”

“If someone wants to open a business in one of my spaces, I have something concrete to show them what is possible.”

Business ideas for the vacant building spaces were pitched in the form of a welcome center, dance hall, arcade, artist’s studio, farmers market, restaurant, grocery store and laundromat. With the aid of the students’ plans and models, Carl said he will be able to entice investment in leasing his properties.

“If someone wants to open a business in one of my spaces, I have something concrete to show them what is possible,” Carl said. “The most significant idea was the multiple uses of space within each building.”

Also mentioned was the idea of leasing the area as a location to film movies, which has served as a surprising draw for the town. A number of television shows, music videos and movies have been shot in Martindale including *A Perfect World*, starring Clint Eastwood and Kevin Costner; *The Newton Boys*, starring Matthew McConaughey and Ethan Hawke; and a 2003 remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

Prentice said her group was making measurements and counting bricks while a movie was being filmed one of the days they were in Martindale. “Needless to say, we received some rather interesting stares. And, of course, we were asked why exactly we were counting bricks out loud in the middle of the afternoon,” Prentice said. “We did our best to explain our class project but



their puzzled and worried facial expressions confirmed they thought we were nuts.”

Carl said the plans could help decide the future of his new home. “The presentations inspired community leaders to encourage more interest in Martindale,” Carl said. “This doesn’t go for just my buildings, but the whole town. There’s a lot of excitement behind it.” ☆

For more information on the interior design program in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, visit <http://www.fcs.txstate.edu/id.htm>.

Texas State interior design students, from left, Elizabeth Cole McCormick, Pamela Klodzinski, Dustin Penney and Travis Witt show off their 3-D design for the city of Martindale. The students presented their downtown concepts to downtown Martindale owner Carlton Carl, the mayor and interested citizens in the Family and Consumer Sciences second floor gallery.

