

Another Codo project to build housing, lifestyle

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The partners who are building hip housing units at the stadium-side "Codo" complex in York have already planned their next project: a similar apartment building geared to young professionals at 26 N. George St., the center of downtown.

That building could be dubbed "Codo 26" and would contain 13 units, said Eric Menzer, a vice president at Manchester Township-based Wagman Construction Inc., which is doing the construction. The partners hope to begin work on the second Codo around the time they open the first next September, Menzer said. The project would cost about \$3 million.

Project leaders say they are doing more than building bricks and mortar: They are trying to build a new identity for York with a no-holds-barred marketing campaign. The idea is to sell Codo as a lifestyle for urbanites, just as retirement communities and golf-course developments sell a lifestyle, Menzer said.

"Codo" is a play on the nearby Codorus Creek and an attempt to develop a brand for the area that is analogous to New York's SoHo (South of Houston Street) or Denver's LoDo (Lower Downtown), he said.

The effort included a teasing banner that for months asked "What is Codo?" and an unveiling event in September that started with a press conference and ended with a party at Sovereign Bank Stadium. Some 600 people attended, said William Swartz III, one of the partners.

The campaign also has a Web site, www.freshyorkpa.com. It is intended to link users with events in York, Swartz said. York has always had a lot to do, he said, it was just a matter of talking to the people who were aware of it.

"Here's that friend that always seems to be in the know," Swartz said of the Web site. "Now, everyone can have him."

This marketing is geared toward people aged about 23 to 40 who may be new in town, Menzer said. The target audience is somewhere between their first job out of college and married life with kids in the suburbs, he said.

The numbers suggest it is working.

The partners already have received 24 applications for the first Codo property, a 36-unit project.

Steve Gohn applied on the night the project was announced. Gohn, 40, is president of CBY Systems Inc., which provides services including debt collection and pre-employment screening.

"I wanted to be one of the first ones in line," Gohn said. "I just really love the downtown area."

CBY is downtown, and Gohn said he frequents places such as the White Rose Bar & Grill, YorkArts, the Strand-Capitol Performing Arts Center and the new baseball stadium. Gohn is separated, and he expects to have his two young daughters over at his new place for visits.

Gohn said he imagines he might be one of the older tenants in the building but figures he will blend in.

"I wouldn't say (I'm) hip, but I'm in touch with younger people," he said.

Urban-redevelopment efforts often focus on home ownership. The argument is that homeowners are more stable than renters and more likely to take pride in their neighborhoods. The Codo project challenges that premise, Swartz said.

The people most likely to take a chance on an up-and-coming neighborhood - young people and artists - are also less likely to buy a home, he said. If rental properties are well managed and city-codes enforcement is strong, renters can be part of a renaissance, he said.

Swartz leads Sherman Property Management Inc. of York, which manages about 500 rental units in and around the city.

Codo is piggybacking on massive redevelopment projects in the neighborhood. The new baseball stadium and the planned redevelopment of the adjacent Northwest Triangle with up to 125 townhomes make it easier for a project such as Codo to move forward, Swartz said.

This is Codo

The first *Codo* is at 241 N. George St. in York, opposite the new Sovereign Bank Stadium. The former York Auto Parts building will be renovated into 18 rental units, and a new building with another 18 units will be added. The project also includes some 10,000 square feet of commercial space, including a proposed café. The \$10 million cost is being offset by a state loan of about \$843,000, funneled through the York County Economic Development Corp.

Rent will start at about \$600. The upper limit has not been determined. Construction work is scheduled to begin within a few weeks, and the building is expected to open in September 2008.

The second Codo is planned for 26 N. George St., in a structure that has long stood vacant but is known as the Gregory's Menswear building. "Codo 26" would have 13 rental units that would top

out at a lower lease rate than the first Codo, said Eric Menzer, a vice president at Wagman Construction Inc.

The Codo partners are a group of prominent businessmen: Louis Appell Jr., former chairman of Susquehanna Pfaltzgraff Co.; George Hodges and William Zimmerman, who own a stake in The Wolf Organization, and John Zimmerman, a former Wolf president; Joe Wagman, chief executive officer of Wagman Construction; and William Swartz III, president of Sherman Property Management Inc.

Wagman Construction is doing the construction, and Sherman will provide property management.

The project is being marketed heavily with tools including Web sites and T-shirts. The campaign should appeal to people in their 20s or early 30s, said Bob Fell, director of strategy and planning at the Pavone Inc. advertising agency in Harrisburg. He is not affiliated with Codo. Fell reviewed a Codo Web site and said it looks effective.

"I'd be shocked if it's not resonating," he said.

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