



Doug Larson

Illinois Valley Community College's Ottawa Center, 321 W. Main Street, is used by about 550 students each semester. The center will continue being leased by IVCC for at least five more years.

IVCC president Corcoran lauds new Ottawa campus pact

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Corcoran

Illinois Valley Community College President Jerry Corcoran visited the Ottawa City Council at its meeting Tuesday to voice his pleasure at the IVCC board of trustees' decision Thursday to extend its lease of its satellite campus in Ottawa for at least five more years.

Ottawa Mayor Robert Eschbach had addressed the IVCC board to explain the value of the Ottawa facility for local students with problems finding transportation to the main campus in Oglesby.

"It was five years ago when I addressed the City Council and we talked about our strategic goals," Corcoran said. "One person I know in particular who would be very proud

would be Commissioner Ed Whitney. He was a big supporter of the college and I know he would be so happy, so proud with how things turned out as a result of the 321 W. Main St., Ottawa center."

Whitney died last December. Corcoran said the college has enrolled more of the high school students from the east side of the district.

"Because of your support the college has done a great job of having more students be aware of what the college has to offer, being aware of the importance of post secondary education in order to get a job and keep a job, and the importance of high quality post secondary education for those

individuals who want to move on to a senior institution," Corcoran said.

"We're looking forward to the next five years in partnership with the college," said Eschbach.

The current price to lease the property is \$14 per square foot per year. That number will drop to \$12 when the new lease kicks in. That is the same price that was charged at the beginning of the current five-year lease.

The price will gradually increase back to \$14 per square foot over the five years of the new lease on the 11,000 square foot facility.

The city will also take over janitorial services for the building, which is expected to save between \$13,000 and \$15,000 each year, and provide \$10,000 in technology upgrades.

Streator real estate has strong advantage

A formula of buying inexpensive property in Streator to start or grow a business is catching on, and entrepreneur Keyurkumar "Kevin" Shah shared the most recent success story.

He and his wife, Reshma, formerly of Glendale Heights, bought the Relax Inn motel in July at 1551 N. Route 23 north of Streator, and The Times published an article about the new business.

Shah read my column earlier this month about the Streator Action Revitalization Team and attended the citizen panel's meeting later that evening.

There, among fellow business leaders, he said buying the hotel for about \$200,000 was a wise investment.

The motel just outside the city limits, formerly known as Pine Towers, was notorious for its uncleanliness and crime.

The Shahs were unaware of the motel's reputation when they bought it, but they put a couple hundred thousand dollars into transforming it.

The rooms were remodeled, exterminated and cleaned. New flooring, furniture, air conditioning and flat-screen televisions were put into each room. Private bathrooms were renovated with new showers and sinks.

The motel added modern amenities, such as wireless Internet, a laundry room and a Starbucks coffee machine. The exterior of the building received a makeover.

Most of all, Shah and his wife stopped renting rooms to bad people.

Guests started coming. Many regulars are traveling contractors from Exelon's La Salle County Generating Station, but even people visiting Starved Rock State Park have checked out rooms at the Streator motel.

With business ownership running through his family's blood, Shah decided to buy the Streator motel — his first business — because it was inexpensive. To build new, at the same square footage, would have cost at least a million dollars, he said.

Plus, he moved his family to Streator, where the cost of schooling, taxes and other items are



OffBeat

DEREK BARICHELLO

much more inexpensive than the Chicago suburbs.

The story resonated with his fellow businessmen and highlighted a selling point for Streator.

Not long ago, barber and cigar shop owner Larry Thomas shared his story about moving his business from downtown Ottawa to Streator, and buying his downtown shop for \$36,000.

"For what it cost to rent (in Ottawa), I will own my building in about five years or less," Thomas said.

Other downtown storefronts were recently sold for \$15,000 at 421 E. Main St., \$19,500 at 414-416 E. Main St. and \$22,000 at 214 N. Bloomington St. To put that into perspective, a 2015 Ford Taurus would have cost more.

While some of these buildings are in need of repair, the overall cost is falling short of what it might cost to buy or lease property in other communities, giving Streator an advantage it may look to promote more in the future.

"Come to Streator to fulfill your dream," one of the START team members said aloud after hearing Shah's story.

While the city has seen stagnant growth of small businesses in its downtown in the past few decades, that kind of sales pitch to follow Shah's path may be just the spark the city needs to attract new growth.

The price is right.

OFF BEAT is a weekly column expanding coverage beyond the regular beat from idea to issues. Email Times staff reporter Derek Barichello at derekb@mywebtimes.com or call 815-431-4073 with news tips, questions or to chat.

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