

# Apartments for the elderly

## A special feature coming soon to a theater near you

By Lisa Christopher  
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In the glory days of its past, the King Theater's slogan was "For a Fling, Visit the King."

Nowadays, that slogan might still ring true when its new \$1.8 million attraction opens in the fall.

The Housing Development Corporation (HDC) and Progressive Investments, Inc. have found an adaptable reuse for the 40-year-old theater and its semi-attached Victorian-era mansion in the 400 block of East King Street, converting them into 43 housing units for senior citizens.

"The theater had been vacant for about six years before we bought it," said Jim Eby, vice president and director of development for HDC.

"It was off the beaten trail for a business use and the city was getting nothing for it in taxes," Eby said.

Headquartered just down the street from the theater, HDC is a developer employing a variety of methods to provide affordable housing. Progressive Investments, also in Lancaster, is headed by W. Edwin Miller and owns a number of renovated rental properties in the city. The theater project is funded by Fulton Bank.

■ Built in 1950, the King showed its last features, "Robin Hood" and "Silent Rage," in 1982. It closed because of declining revenues and, for a short time afterward, housed the King's Temple church and a seafood market. Before being sold for apartment conversion there was a proposal to turn it into a teen dance club. But that idea was opposed by neighbors.

The King probably would have remained idle if not for Progressive Investments' Miller, who planted an idea in Eby's brain.

"I had looked at that building some years ago and I guess, at the time, I just didn't have the imagination to figure out how we could build it," Eby said. "Theaters and churches are probably the most difficult types of buildings to re-use. Their space is what makes them unusual.

"But then, Edwin looked at the theater and had this idea you could build a building inside of the building."

That is essentially what was done to convert the old theater.

Windows were knocked out of the exterior brick walls and the building was sectioned off into three floors.

The ground and first floor branch from the lobby level. The ground level keeps the theater auditorium's downward grading. It slopes toward the rear and levels off at the same

grading as the parking lot which runs the length of the building. The first floor also is built on a grade in an opposing or upward slope until it, too, becomes level toward the rear of the building. The third floor was traditionally constructed above the other two.

Next door, the Victorian mansion was part of the theater property and used as its office.

"They had a room with all the ushers' uniforms and big boxes of movie tickets and posters," Eby said.

A couple of two-bedroom and two one-bedroom apartments will be converted from the expansive Victorian mansion. The two-bedroom apartments in this building are the only two in the complex that are not accessible by elevator or ramp.

In all, the King Theatre Apartments complex has six studio apartments, each \$335 a month; 29 one-bedroom apartments, \$355; and eight two-bedroom apartments, \$399. Rents include heat, hot water, sewer and trash removal.

Eby said HDC already has a list of 107 people who have expressed interest in the converted apartment building. HDC began accepting applications last Monday for prospective residents. All tenants must be at least 62 years old and meet income requirements. Section 8 vouchers, rent subsidies from HUD, will be accepted.

■ Although the carpenters' table saws continue to whirl in parts of the converted apartment building, its personality will still reflect its movie palace past when it is completed by mid-September.

The theater's old art deco lobby remains largely intact. A pastel mosaic stone floor, wall mirrors etched in reverse-painted, fan-shaped designs, and marble trim have all been carefully preserved during construction and will be restored to their original splendor.

Under the marquee, movie posters again will fill the display windows. Even the ticket booth will stay.

"As far as the old ticket booth goes, we have a standing offer of \$10 for anyone who can find a good use for it," Eby said.

"Recycling a building is better than tearing it



Sunday News/Jack Leonard  
Sneak preview: King Theater Apartments.

down," Miller said. "It tells a lot of the history of the past and it satisfies a need in the community."

Officials of both Progressive Investments and HDC are known in the city for their commitment to redevelopment. Progressive Investments is funding a project to renovate the former Swan Hotel on South Queen Street. HDC recently completed a \$1 million purchase/renovation project on its headquarters in the Eastern Market building in the 300 block of East King.

Eby said that although most of it is run-down, he likes the East King Street neighborhood for its unique architectural styles and traditional row homes. Although he wouldn't be specific, Eby said HDC is considering more renovation projects in the city.

"We're always looking at stuff. But I think we'd like to see how the rent-up goes at the King," he said. "But we have a real stake here and we would like to do more."