

**KC Business Magazine – Drinks with...  
November 2007**

For an expanded, unabridged version of the interview go to [KCBCentral.com](http://KCBCentral.com)



THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNION HILL HAS BEEN A 25-YEAR WORK IN PROGRESS, FOR BOB FRYE, WHO'S LEADING THE PROJECT, IT'S ALL ABOUT CREATING A NEIGHBOURHOOD THAT WILL OUTLAST HIM.

Each month, KCB sits down for a drink (or cup of coffee) and some dialogue with one of the Kansas City business community's most interesting and in-the-know insiders. For our November issue, we met Bob Frye, the Union Hill developer, at the Filling Station at 29<sup>th</sup> and McGee.

*KCB: Let's introduce you to our readers.*

BF: Basically, I own the company that is the developer of Union Hill. Union Hill is about 20 city blocks, though we do not own very big pieces because most of the neighborhood is single-family

homes... We basically have the developing rights for the area and we are essentially developing the sites that are blighted.

*KCB: People, if they are familiar with area, might be most familiar with the Velvet Dog, which has been there for 15 years. But in the last several years things have really taken off.*

BF: We did the development area at 31<sup>st</sup> and Gillham about four years ago. Where Spy is, and now The Drop and Tower and Berbiglia, we developed that corner (Martini Corner) about three years ago... Now we kind of started working on the Gillham side, continuing on to The Founders project that is now here.

*KCB: And The Founders project is condos and apartments?*

BF: Apartments and some retail.

*KCB: And you're planning four blocks of street-level retail with a pedestrian walkway from 29<sup>th</sup> and McGee along Gillham to 31<sup>st</sup> Street.*

BF: You know, it is kind of funny. One of the reasons we did a project this big on this side was to create that anchor. We felt that it needed enough critical mass. Before we did this, it had been about 40 years since people actually came to Gillham and McGee. We did a lot of focus group things, and we actually didn't have negatives. Now the plan is we're just going to start filling in the little pieces in between.

*KCB: How much retail space are you talking?*

BF: Total about 40,000 square feet in (the first) phase.. The next one would be about another 40. Total 120 – 130,000 square feet... Ad we want to be sure that the retailers fit the mold (of the development).

*KCB: Are you looking for restaurants?*

BF: Some more restaurants, although we kind of feel like we are getting that. At least that base is starting to fill in. We want to create services that support the housing that supports the retail base. We have a dry cleaner already and would like to get a bank. Then there is the always-elusive grocery store.

*KCB: There is a lot happening downtown with residential development, but I am interested in your take on what distinguishes this area from another development halfway down the road.*

BF: Number one, it's not a project in the middle of other projects or just, you know, within an area. Being a neighborhood there is a strong sense of community among the people that live here. It is functioning. And I think that is what is our biggest separation – that it has a neighborhood feel to it. And in that, it isn't a Disneyland. It's a real thing. My absolute hope would be that 20 years from now, when it's all been done for a few years, that nobody would think 'oh well, that was a project.' It would just look like an urban neighborhood that had grown organically and was not forced to happen.

*KCB: You have been working on this for 25 years. That is a long time. What is your philosophy as a developer?*

BF: First of all, we have a great relationship with the neighborhood. You don't do what we do for 25 years and not have a positive relationship with the neighborhood. Then we have to be sure that it will financially work. It doesn't do anybody any good to have the developer fail. That doesn't help the neighborhood.

*KCB: How do you go about doing that?*

BF: We study the market pretty carefully. We do a lot of focus groups, and we listen. But in the end, I think it comes down to judgment. But I think the other advantage is that we are here for the very long term. I am fortunate enough that I am not trying to make next quarter's numbers. We think in at least decade-long. We don't do anything, really, in less than 10 years. And that would be a big part of our philosophy. We tend to have a very long-term vision.