

## Group formed to promote OKC's Uptown

by Brianna Bailey

Published: December 20th, 2011

OKLAHOMA CITY – Once in decline, the area known as Uptown around NW 23rd Street is flourishing again, with several new shops and restaurants opening in the area. Business owners and residents are in the process of organizing a new neighborhood and merchants' association to help promote the area.

The new group, called Uptown 23rd, is in the process of organizing committees to tackle community issues such as marketing, beautification and crime.

Though there have been attempts by other business owners on NW 23rd Street to organize a similar group over the years, there has never been enough momentum to keep anything going, said Kim Cooper-Hart, who runs the Oklahoma City's Commercial District Revitalization Program.

"With everything going on in the area now, it seemed like a really good time to do it and it just kind of grew from there," she said.

Other Oklahoma City areas such as Plaza District and Stockyards City have benefited from forming similar neighborhood groups, Cooper-Hart said.

"It allows them to access city service through a single voice – I can't stress how important that is," she said.

Jennifer Seal, who is in the process of opening a neighborhood bar called Grandad's at 317 NW 23rd St. with her husband, Greg Seal, is serving as interim president of Uptown 23rd.

"The goal of the group is making the area a thriving business community and a destination spot for Oklahomans," Seal said. "Lots of people remember fondly what 23rd Street was once like and we want to build on that former glory and make it a better place for people to come and shop."

After stalling because of the last economic downturn, the owners of the long-empty Tower Theater hope to begin renovations on the building within the next two months.

"There has been quite a bit of interest in the area lately," said Marty Dillon, one of the owners of the Tower Theater.

Dillon has also been involved in organizing the new Uptown 23rd group.

"I think it's going to be a really nice thing for the area to have," Dillon said.

Construction will transform the old movie house into a special events center, restaurant and retail space.

The Oklahoma City Urban Design Commission on Wednesday is scheduled to reconsider renovation plans for the theater originally approved in 2007. Architect Brian Fitzsimmons applied for a \$730,000 building permit on Tuesday to begin remodeling work on the theater, according to city records.