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University of Dayton

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# Pittsburgh's revival shows way for Dayton

\$158 million of riverfront development and downtown rehabilitation has brought new, vibrant residents into the city. By Lucas Sullivan, Staff Writer - Monday, July 5, 2010

DAYTON — Pittsburgh was Dayton 10 years ago: Empty smokestacks serving as vacant museums of a booming industrial past, blighted neighborhoods and a once-bustling downtown abandoned after business hours.

And like Dayton, several plans to revitalize the city quietly vanished as elected and business leaders struggled to reach a consensus on what should be done or how it should be funded.

Today, Pittsburgh offers proof an industrial town can be reborn — and is a possible blueprint for cities like Dayton to follow.

Pittsburgh officials say \$4 billion in revenue has been breathed into the region's economy after pouring \$158 million (\$90 million public) into riverfront development and rehabbing 12 downtown buildings for residential use.

The city boasts a downtown occupancy rate of 93 percent with an overwhelming majority of new residents between the ages of 21 and 35, a jackpot for any community developer.

Dayton has a riverfront, young people and lots of potential for downtown housing. The question is whether there is the will to make it happen.

"It takes a leap of faith," said Rob Stephany of Pittsburgh's Urban Redevelopment Authority. "It takes a savvy developer who knows the ins and outs of tax credits. It takes the right team (of public and private leaders) and a group of people who aren't scared."

Dayton isn't starting from scratch. It's newly opened RiverScape park addition nicely complements nearby Fifth Third Field and CareSource's new building. A plan to put kayaks and other recreation on the river seems to have some support.

But while public and private leaders tout the success of the Dayton Dragons in bringing people downtown, there's been little spinoff development or impact on restaurants downtown or in the Oregon District. It's a small pearl on a big necklace.

"There has been a lot of vitality added to downtown, but I agree we need more versatility as far keeping people here," said Sandy Gudorf, president of the Downtown Dayton Partnership. "We have to find ways to better use the river because it's our economic engine. It's time to get something done."