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April 4, 2016

www.thebusinessnews.com

Vol. 13, No. 25 \$1.00

A place to live, work, play



Steve Atkins, right, and his son Dan, stand near some of the residential apartments his company is building as part of a development in Hobart that will also include commercial, retail, and recreational elements on about 75 acres. The Business News photo by Eric Popp

Builder a believer in Hobart project that includes luxury apartments, businesses

By Sean Schultz

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Builder Steve Atkins hasn't had a lot of time to enjoy the "play" concept of the live-work-play building projects he's been behind since he broke ground on the first 33-unit apartment building in the semi-rural village of Hobart in January 2015.

The big picture shows more than 750 residential units being built and occupied in a five-year span in the development in Hobart which is sited on the western edge of Brown County off State Hwy 29 on a long and narrow swath of property boasting just 33 square miles.

Atkins Building Group Inc. is the owner and general contractor of Hobart Crossing Luxury Apartments, the early phase of the planned community that will be unlike anything in the region. His partners in the project include Dick Hanzel of Middleton and Phil Simon of Waunakee, men he came to know through their membership in the Wisconsin Builders Association and the National Association of Home Builders-Builder 20 Program, a peer group of similar builders throughout the U.S. that act as a sort of a board of directors for each other.

Atkins, a Cincinnati native, arrived in Northeastern Wisconsin 20 years ago as a manager at Hoida Lumber for what he expect-

ed would be a five-year span of his life. He stayed because he found the region to be "a really great place to raise a family." Atkins brought along his degree in architecture and an MBA.

He first started building homes in the year 2000 and then ultimately began building in Hobart and the Thornberry Creek subdivision in 2008 in the depths of the recession. He helped lead the resurgence of a development that had been dormant for some time. Through that effort, he came to know Andrew Vickers, Hobart's village administrator. The two are keys to not just the Hobart Crossing development, but also the Centennial Centre master plan development, a mix of homes, jobs and commerce.

Vickers got involved in the planning process as soon as he came to Hobart in 2008. He praised Atkins' work. "Steve has an amazing eye and most importantly, there's no cutting corners with Steve. Centennial Centre will feature neighborhood-based stores, retailers, business/office development and service-related businesses on 75 acres. Industries have been drawn to the center, including Centennial Machine and Grinding in 2010, EMT International, the village's largest taxpayer and employer; and Emerald Bay Retirement Community, a 52-bed assisted living facility.

This successful green field development "will have all the needed components for success: business, professional, retail and convenience," Vickers added. "Some communities have one of those features; we have all of them. There's nothing like it in terms of growth."

He added that the TIF district is very successful with a \$108 million valuation so far. Hobart's population has seen a 49 percent increase in population since 2010.

Atkins is a believer in the vision for Hobart as a dynamic community on the rise. "As an investor and general contractor, I had to have a fair amount of faith that it would be successful," he said. In fact, it now boasts the second highest percentage of growth in the state over the past five years and can rightfully claim to be the second most successful tax incremental finance (TIF) district in the state. "There has been \$100 million in TIF value in Centennial Centre alone and even greater throughout the village," he said.

Reconstruction of State Hwy 29 and completion of the fly over ending at US 41 gives Hobart much better proximity to Green Bay.

"Hobart formed a vision and put it on paper," Atkins said. "People look at Centennial Centre and are shocked. It's well thought out. I'm definitely a believer in what Hobart is

trying to do" with the land he described as "a semi-rural community with mostly high-end homes and farmland."

Back at Hobart Crossing, his first building is 100 percent leased and his second is half completed. Later this year, two more 52-unit buildings will go up. The residential buildings include studio, one and two-bedroom luxury units meant to appeal to millennials and empty nesters.

The new housing units include high-end cabinetry, granite countertops, plank floors and upgraded appliances. Other amenities — "things you would expect to find in a new home," he said, include individual programmable heating and air conditioning, underground heated garages, clubroom, fitness center, business center, and an outdoor pool area.

The buildings are smoke-free and pets are allowed.

Vickers said Hobart, "which was 12 years a village with no downtown," will be the fastest growing municipality in Wisconsin, with a population increase of 77 percent by 2040. That's pretty good, considering much of the development of Centennial Centre at Hobart was a bean field the village purchased in 2008. That 300 acres "did not sit idle long," he said. "The rentals are being absorbed just as fast as we can build them. There are upwards of 1,500 residents in that half-square-mile area."

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