

Main Street Café

Wed., Feb. 15, 1:00 PM

MSM's March newsletter

Tom Scott & Ann Burkett

Q. What made you decide to live in Santa Rosa County and choose property in downtown Milton?

A. I have been watching the town of Milton for approximately 15 years now. Milton is a unique town with a character and a charm that affects everyone who enters it. When I first came to Milton years ago I had considered going to Pensacola for work so that I could live here, but that opportunity didn't arrive until about 6 years ago. Once here, there was simply nothing for sale in town, so I settled in Pace where I was lucky enough to meet Ann Burkett of the Santa Rosa County Chamber of Commerce. Over the years I kept watching the city and the riverfront for something to purchase. My draw to the riverfront is water sports. I have been a sailing instructor most of my life (U.S. Sail Certified) and I have a general love of fishing and swimming.

Q. Which property have you purchased and what are your future plans?

A. My partner Ann Burkett and I have purchased the riverfront property from the Santa Rosa Veterans Memorial South to the CSX Railroad Trestle and then west to the CSX Railroad property that abuts Elmira Street. This week marked the beginning of the demolition phase in our portion of the Milton Revitalization called Riverwalk South. In March we will step into our planning phase which will include everything from talking with the city to inviting inputs from Milton's citizens. We have had the opportunity to meet some very energetic people in our community and I feel their thoughts and ideas are going to be a big part of all this. Our priority list is:

1. Protect the integrity of the town's historic charm.
2. Create residences to bring people back into town.
3. Support people living in town with shopping, service business, and recreation.
4. Create a people-friendly waterfront with ample temporary docking facilities for visitors.

Our initial planning is leaning towards retail shops (much like those now on Willing Street) with residential lofts above them. These upper-floor lofts are planned to contain approximately 1800 to 2300 square feet and be designed for the young professional or "empty nest" couple. Lofts, which face the proposed park, can opt to have porches on both park-side to view concerts and riverside to view the Riverwalk Park and waterway. The placement of the structures will be such that each unit has a full view of the river and units built inland will have "river view". The lower floor will be leased retail. These units can house various

stores to provide in-town services to residents. Ann and I are working with the other area developers to make sure we don't duplicate any of the businesses we bring in. Once the first phase (a 3-unit plan) becomes reality, we will go back to the drawing board and plan our next phase.

Q. What potential do you see for downtown Milton?

A. I think that the days of saying "*Milton really has potential*" are over. Milton is now realizing its potential and we are glad to see its residents embracing it. Milton's great potential is its size and relationship to the surrounding community. It's obvious that a lot of work over many years has created both an Eco-tourism base and a historic tradition that is a solid foundation for any direction we take. Each day that goes by we meet a person or group that has worked hard to perfect their portion of today's Milton. They should all be very proud of the foundation they have laid. We too, hope to contribute to that foundation for the next generation.

Q. If you could change anything about downtown, what would it be?

A. Milton needs a Central Park surrounded by a vibrant community of residents. Mixed with those residential elements should be art galleries, antique stores, clothing shops, cafés and service establishments. The park should provide weekly events to include old movies in the summer (which would be shown at the Imogene Theatre in the winter) and regular live entertainment.

Q. Why did you become involved with Main Street Milton?

A. When I found out that Ann and I could become "revitalizers" with the Main Street Milton team we jumped at it. I feel that Main Street Milton is the cohesive force that brings all of the separate city and county groups together on revitalization. Main Street Milton also works hard to keep us informed on matters that are important to us and they seem to partner well with all of the businesses that are so vital to the growth of our city.

Q. What issues would you like to see Main Street Milton play a more active role in?

A. Two things: *Membership* and *consolidation-of-effort*. Through Main Street Milton membership, I would like to see more citizens involved in what we do and I would like to see Main Street continue to actively participate in that. By consolidation, I would like to see Main Street Milton establish a *Regional Planning Council*. A *Regional Planning Council* would bring all of the not-for-profit groups under one roof, pool their resources and appoint a single manager and a single promotional agent. This council would assign individual committees under one coordinator to enhance how we "package" our region. *Packaging* is what brings visitors to your city. A single council would eliminate duplication-of-effort. Currently, we have all

these great people doing great things in the same general region. I think we can bring this talent under one roof and do incredible things.

Q. What obstacles do you see for business owners in our downtown area?

A. The major obstacle in downtown has to be the old jail. It's an oppressive eyesore. Condemned buildings project the wrong image in a town that is in revitalization. Our ability to effectively bring visitors to our city depends on our daily efforts to eliminate blight. On the larger scale the looming discussion about larger roads that tear through our historic district, some eliminating historic structures, has to be settled and our governmental leaders need to know alternate routes around Milton are required to keep the historical integrity of the city. These "unknowns" are major obstacles to businesses entering Milton and the expansion of existing businesses.

Q. What advice would you offer anyone desiring to purchase property in downtown Milton?

A. Do it now, be informed and get involved. Milton is not only a very affordable place to live, it is filled with a diverse group of residents from a variety of backgrounds who have come together with Milton's future as their priority. Joining Main Street Milton is a good first step to being informed.