

Midway Matters

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Visions for the Snelling-University Intersection

By Dave Healy

The northwest corner of the Snelling-University intersection, currently a vacant lot, was most recently occupied by a CVS pharmacy.

That store closed in April of 2022 and sat vacant for four years. Demolition began in March of 2026 and is now complete.

The city of St. Paul has announced plans for market-rate apartments and retail space on the site. This development would be led by the 499 Snelling Company, which is managed by Bill McGuire, a part owner of the Minnesota United RC soccer team. His company, Snelling-Midway Redevlopment LLC, is developing United Village, on the intersection's southeast corner.

Midway Matters is interested in what other people would like to see on the old CVS site. We interviewed business owners and local officials to get their views.

Tom Stransky, co-owner of Midway Books, 1579 University Avenue: "I'd like to see a parking ramp there for our customers."

MaiNeng Vang, owner of Snelling Avenue Fine Wines, 500 Snelling Avenue N: "I would like to see a grocery store there. Now that Cub is closed, we don't have anywhere in the neighborhood for people to buy groceries."

Nate Kranz, manager of the Turf Club, 1601 University Avenue W: "I don't think whatever I might wish for will change the city's plans. But anything will be an improvement over what we've had for the last four years. I'm cautiously optimistic, though I do have some concerns about a residential property going in so close to an entertainment venue like ours. We'll continue to need convenient access for our performers and customers."

Jennifer B., regional manager for Lover's Garden, 1607 University Avenue W: "With no on-street parking along here, we could really use a parking lot. I parked a block away last winter and got a ticket."

Molly Coleman, Ward 4 city council member: "This was a private sale of land, so while there is an immense amount of interest in what happens to the site, it was ultimately not the result of a city-led plan.

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The Former CVS Pharmacy site at Snelling and Univeristy Avenues

Remembering the Midway

By Paul Healy

I grew up near the fairgrounds, an area we called "the Midway," though we were a few miles from the real Midway, which I consider the Snelling/University area. But our phone number had a 64 prefix, which labeled us as Midway people.

We drove to the Midway to attend Central Baptist church, on the corner of Roy and Shields Streets. And we enjoyed the Midway's remarkable collection of retail and eating places, as well as service industries, just a short distance from our church.

Midway Center offered a wide range of retail establishments: grocery, bowling, clothing, shoes, laundromat, liquor. With retail giant Montgomery Ward anchoring Midway Center, there wasn't much that we couldn't buy a short distance from church. And Ax-Man Surplus, a long-time Midway presence specializing in oddball goods, might just have had what we needed that Wards and other local stores didn't carry.

Yes, the Midway had it all, from used cars sold along University Avenue, to an iron lung, one of many novelty items at Ax-Man. And we had a bank, Midway Bank, and later, Midwest Federal, to help finance such outrageous purchases. We even had our own funeral home.

Medical services were available in the heart of the Midway. Midway Medical Arts housed doctors and dentists, and Midway Hospital, with 333 beds, had a usual occupancy rate of 86%. As a child I visited Dr. William Watson, our family medic, though the good doctor did house calls. I had my knee operated on at Midway Hospital.

In addition to the many retail places in the Midway, it has been home to dozens of eating and drinking establishments. Some were part of local, regional, or national restaurant chains, while others were strictly one-of-a-kind. One site had three different tenants over the years: Embers, Denny's, and Kim Huoy Chor, which reportedly ran afoul of city sanitation ordinances.

I remember enjoying meals at The Best Steak House, Earl's Pizza, Andy's Garage, Viking Village (successor to the Sweden House), Quality Cafeteria, Bridgeman's, Applebee's, and Bussman's.

Most of the Midway's many restaurants offered fairly simple and inexpensive fare — easy on the palate and pocketbook. Perhaps there was one exception, a possible concession to fine dining: the Blue Horse. I always felt they were a bit pretentious for the Midway. I never ate there or even went inside to look around. I imagined elaborate place settings, expensive china, and an extensive wine list. We smirked when we saw fancy cars unloading well-dressed diners.

Pretentious, maybe, but part of the diversity of the Midway, and perhaps a necessary counterbalance to Porky's and White Castle.

There's much more to say about the history of the Midway, and I'll cover some of that ground in future installments of this column.



On August 15, TC Cats performed their seventh concert at Central Baptist Church, 420 Roy St. N. Usually held in the parking lot, this concert was moved indoors because of the weather. A cover band that plays 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s rock and roll, TC Cats are led by Midway resident DJ Traudt (center), and they've been together for over 50 years under various names, playing nearly 2,000 shows throughout the Midwest. And they'll be back at Central Baptist next summer.

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"I'm pleased that the steps the city took to demolish the CVS laid the groundwork for this sale to happen and am thrilled that we're going to see the site put to a much better and higher use.

"While there are of course many different things that it would be wonderful to see there, we know that housing and retail are top priorities for our transit-oriented intersections, and I'm confident that this will be a significant addition to our Midway community."

If you have a suggestion for a *Midway Matters* article, please contact Central Baptist Church.

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