



GRIFFIN



INSIDE ON OLIVE:

A rare blend of architecture, community and history emerging in Grand Center

BY ABBY WOJCIK
AND JEFF FISTER

Twenty years ago, local developer Steve Trampe helped restore the long-vacant Continental Life Building near Grand Center, transforming the 1929 art deco tower into apartments as the surrounding arts district began to expand. Grove Properties purchased the building in 2024 and assumed responsibility for the debt.

Now, a few blocks away, Trampe and Emily Rauh Pulitzer, a St. Louis-based philanthropist and founder of the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, are behind another ambitious residential project.

They are transforming a one-block stretch of Olive Street (between Vandeventer and Spring avenues) into an innovative model for architecture, community, preservation and urban living. The project combines commissioned architecture, shared amenities, historic preservation and privately owned residences in a for-

mat unlike anything else in St. Louis or elsewhere.

Known as On Olive, the \$30 million project includes 17 contemporary homes, two condominiums and an apartment building with 35 units on a 3.3-acre property. Residents have access to an interesting mix of amenities, including a dog park, meditation garden, pool, outdoor grilling area and fire pit, and a food forest — all within a shared, gated residence.

They broke ground in 2019 believing modern homes by notable architects would attract an audience of art and architecture enthusiasts. A total of ten local and internationally renowned architects were selected to design living spaces that feel authentic to the local environment, encourage interaction and spark creativity.

“Olive is one of the most historic streets in St. Louis,” Trampe said. “It’s hard to find almost any other place where you’ve had agricultural use, industrial use, residential use,



ABBY WOJCIK PHOTO

Phase one of On Olive is complete, transforming formerly vacant lots into a residential community centered on modern architecture, shared amenities and walkability.

commercial use, entertainment use and transportation all.”

What began as agricultural common fields worked by early French settlers later became a transportation corridor lined with cable cars and rail activity, followed by residential homes, theaters, schools and commercial businesses. In more recent decades, the site became a

collection of vacant lots and deteriorating structures. Trampe said the development team wanted to acknowledge that layered history with artifacts incorporated throughout the property.

They’ve acquired former Missouri Botanical Garden gates from when its entrance was on Flora Place, as

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A CONVERSATION WITH VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE ALI RAND ON TORNADO ANNIVERSARY

By Nicki Dwyer

Several days after the May 16, 2025 tornado ripped through the Central West End, Ali Rand received an Instagram message from a woman who had a friend in the

Academy neighborhood asking if she could help board up windows on Enright in the Academy neighborhood. She and her husband Justin were deep into the process of dealing with extensive storm damage to their own home, but they and friends from Forsyth School, which the Rands’ 5 children attend, went to help. A year later, Ali and Carroll Lehnhoff-Bell, whose home was also in the tornado’s path, continue to help neighbors who are still dealing with the storm’s aftermath.

What made you want to get involved in such an enormous project and stick with it?

I wouldn’t say I ever wanted to take it on. I just wanted to help bring some normalcy back to the



Continued on Page 10 Ali Rand, left, and Carroll Lehnhoff-Bell, right, with neighbors on Enright.

OLIVE From Page 1



A historical photo of the Continental Building.



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE TRAMPE

Designed by Tatiana Bilbao ESTUDIO, one of the 17 residents known as Confluence House.



ABBY WOJCIK PHOTO

Another view of Phase One of On Olive.

well as remnants of the city's rail history and a restored polar bear sign from the former Polar Wave Ice and Fuel Co.

The only building left standing on the site before development began was the boarded-up, historic Wolfner Building, which previously housed the Henry L. Wolfner Library for the Blind. The St. Louis Historic Preservation Commission approved renovation plans that ensure preservation of the Italian Renaissance facade, while the interior is reimagined as a clubhouse and two condominiums.

Phase one is complete, with each unique dwelling built and only one left unoccupied. Phase two involves construction of ten traditional homes on the northside of the development, whose residents will have the option of buying into the amenities. Trampe said he hopes to begin phase two in the fall.

While On Olive isn't publicly accessible, it reflects a broader shift toward increased walkability, sustainability and urban living that's connected to the surrounding environment.

"People who live there have to like people and they have to want to be interested in socializing with their neighbors because this is a very connected community. And so, we've created a neighborhood, which is so exciting, from nothing," Trampe said.

The development adds architectural variety to a Grand Center landscape dominated by student-oriented apartment buildings near St. Louis University. It also sits within walking distance of the Fox Theatre, Powell Hall, the Contemporary Art Museum, Kranzberg Arts Center, Grandel Square Theatre and many of the city's major cultural institutions.

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