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BREAKING[Grenade found in Aurora home](#)
NEWSALERT >> Aurora police were called to a home in the 200 block of Central Avenue at about 12:35 p.m. where a grenade was reportedly found while the home was being cleaned out. **Check back for updates.**

Downtown shows off its homey spaces

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June 17, 2009

By **MARISSA AMONI** For The Beacon News

AURORA -- It couldn't have been a more perfect day to be "wowed" by the residential spaces of downtown Aurora. The sun was shining, the trolleys were dinging and locals were getting their fill of rare glimpses into downtown abodes.

A few hundred people came downtown on Sunday afternoon for the first Living Downtown Tour sponsored by Aurora Downtown, an association of downtown business owners.

And the consensus was "unexpected surprise."

"It is marvelous to be able to go into buildings that you drive by and see all the time," said Pat Dreas, who was on the tour with Marie Brestel. Dreas has lived in Aurora for 45 years and Brestel for 30 years.

Standing in a one-bedroom apartment on the 12th floor of Fox Island Place (the old Leland Tower), Dreas and Brestel spoke of how downtown once was, with drugstores and soda fountains.

"We love to see Aurora being updated. ... It is wonderful -- just the fact that (downtown) is getting more residences," Brestel said.

The tour received rave reviews at all of its stops. Downtown arts cultivator Benjie Hughes said the experience was "unreal" as he leaned out of one of three third-floor balconies attached to Sergio Furniture at 36 W. Downer Place overlooking the Fox River.

The top floor of the old Woodworth Cart Factory is being remodeled into a Spanish-influenced four-bedroom private residence for storeowner Ernesto Ochoa, his wife, Kit, and daughter, Alicia. Hughes ran through the end of the tour with his wife, Amy, after he left his post at 67 S. Stolp Ave. where Hughes leases the space for his recording studio, Backthird Audio.

Above Margarita Marchan-Mankus' law practice, Victor Matlock and his wife, Kenyatta, were walking around the city-chic loft at 64 E. Downer Place rented by Zach and Andrea Goforth.

"We just moved to Aurora a year ago. We wanted to see what they've been doing downtown," said Matlock.

The Goforths showed visitors the tall restored windows and explained that they were still figuring out how to use the open-space floor plan. The young musical couple moved in less than a year ago, but agree that the place is well-suited for them. Without any nearby neighbors, Andrea said, "It is perfect for our loud musician lifestyle."

They even used the setting for the cover art on Andrea's recently released album, "First Try at Goodbye."

"It has so much character," Zach said.

Jim Daugherty is another downtown renter who opened his residence at 2 N. Stolp in the North Island Apartments. Daugherty said living in the former Aurora Hotel -- circa 1917 -- is wonderful.

"Everything is to my taste and rents are fantastically cheap," he said.

The building was restored to its original splendor in 1996, and a highlight of the tour was the grand lobby with incredible woodwork and marble stairs.

A gem on the tour was the old Holbrook Mill at 121 W. Benton St. David Lewis, curator at the Aurora Regional Fire Museum, is in the process of restoring the building, circa 1843, into both a private residence and commercial space.

Downer Place Lofts at 220 E. Downer Place and River Street Plaza at 100 S. River St. also opened their condos for tours.

Downtown developer Dan Hites added a treat to the tour by showing off both his own private residence at 20 W. Downer Place and his River Breeze Loft Apartments at 60 S. River St. The nine environmentally friendly apartments could be move-in ready this summer.

Of course, it was the incredible views of the Fox River and the entire downtown out of apartment windows and balconies that really were amazing.

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