

Squared away
By James Haynes
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Standing in front of Lynn's atomic clock, State Rep. Robert Fennell posed with an oversized pair of scissors, waiting to cut a ribbon on Lynn's Central Square.

With \$41 million in private investment in the area in recent years, and both residential development and businesses returning to the long-abandoned heart of the city, Fennell, an established business owner in the Square himself, was helping declare what city and business leaders and community development officials have long waited to hear: the downtown once again has a pulse.

"I'm encouraged and optimistic with what I'm seeing. It's good to see new neighbors moving in," he told a crowd of about 50, gathered in the Square Thursday afternoon. "Welcome to my neighborhood. I look forward to seeing you in the years ahead."

It was a busy schedule of events, with ribbon cuttings at numerous businesses including the Keith Building Loft Condominiums, Omar & Oscars Jewelers, and the Central Square Barber Shop, and a pace matching the energy of the crowd.

A younger crowd packed into the Raw Arts attractions, with the buttery smell of popcorn pouring onto the street from the Real to Reel film screening. On the fourth floor of the gallery, people crowded around cardboard laid out for a breakdance exhibition.

On the opposite end of the arts spectrum, yet only a 100 yards or so from RAW, a primer set of art appreciators stuffed Lynn Arts nearly beyond comfortable capacity, tipping free wine and sampling hors d'oeuvres while bidding on all-expense dinners for two at L'Espalier in the evening's live auction.

"It's great to see life in the Square," said State Rep. Steven Walsh. "We get traffic here during the days, but it's wonderful to see events here in the evening and a nightlife reemerging in the city center."

And in one of the more anticipated grand openings - Lynn's City Council and EDIC have thrown support behind the venture, even featuring it as an example of development in the Square during the recent Student Government Day - the Gulu-Gulu Café was "incredibly busy," according to owner Steve Feldmann.

Looking like a small slice of Boston's South End transplanted into Lynn, from its wine and beer selection to the exposed brick and ductwork and paintings by Boston artist Bren Bataclan, patrons were doing well if they could find a seat Thursday evening.

"My wife and I worked here until 4 a.m. this morning," said Feldmann, pleased with the turnout. "We went home and got a few hours sleep, and came back. We've been busy ever since."

Keeping up the momentum, however, will require effort.

"One theme we have in common tonight is everyone working together toward progress in our city to see Central Square become the vibrant heart of our community," said Mayor Edward J. Clancy. "Tonight is a start. Progress is our most important project."