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Redeveloping Waldorf

Sen. Middleton leading successful makeover of the town

From the Waldorf farm where he has lived all of his 53 years, state Sen. Thomas M. "Mac" Middleton (D-Charles) has watched his hometown change in ways he never expected.

When Middleton was born, Waldorf was a small farming community with a post office, a railroad station and a handful of general stores.

In the 1950s, as casinos and hotels sprouted along Route 301, the highway that cuts through town, it became a tourist destination.

That changed in the 1960s when slot machines were outlawed and the casinos were replaced by restaurants and shops. And when Charles became one of the fastest-growing counties in Maryland in the 1980s and 1990s, Waldorf emerged as the county's retail center, with shopping centers and strip malls lining Route 301.

Now, on the eve of the next millennium, Middleton said Waldorf is a town in search of its soul.

"Waldorf is just happening on its own," the senator said.

"Obviously, it's developed, but it has developed without a vision or a feel for how we want it to be."

In recent years, Middleton has worked to change that. His goal is now being realized.

In 1998, the senator assembled a group of Waldorf business people to suggest ways to improve development of the unincorporated town of 43,000 residents and 1,200 businesses. The group determined the county must establish planning guidelines and an architectural theme for Waldorf.

The Charles County Commission in July appointed a committee of Waldorf residents to draft a "subarea plan" for the town that will draft the guidelines Middleton's group suggested.

Also this summer, the county commission created rules that could be used to approve city-style development in the town, such as



Vision for the future: Sen. Thomas M. "Mac" Middleton (D-Charles) stands in front of the Hamilton Centre II on Route 925 in Waldorf. Middleton, a lifelong resident of the unincorporated town, has led a campaign to redevelop it.

taller buildings and sidewalk-lined neighborhoods that mix shops and homes.

Meanwhile, Waldorf-based Chaney Enterprises Inc. has proposed redeveloping 600 acres in town. Elsewhere, an Alexandria, Va., developer has announced a plan to build twin seven-story office towers in town.

'We need to make it pleasant to look at'

Throughout Maryland, business and government leaders are thinking about ways to take advantage of the state's Smart Growth program, which seeks to control suburban sprawl by channeling growth into older towns like Waldorf.

Even in Charles County, Waldorf isn't alone in its campaign to redevelop itself. La Plata, the county seat, recently embarked on a "visioning plan." Meanwhile, the county commission has appointed a committee to draft a subarea plan for Bryans Road, the unincorporated town western Charles town. Nearby Indian Head is also in the midst of a revitalization effort.

But it is Waldorf, the biggest town in Charles County, that seems to have captured the imagination of county business people.

Northern Charles town is county's business, housing hub

In this edition, *Business* begins a series of occasional reports on the major towns in Charles County with a look at the county's business and housing center, Waldorf.

The unincorporated town in northern Charles is home to approximately 43,000 residents and half of the county's estimated 2,400 businesses, according to county and chamber statistics. It is also home to public institutions such as Civista Health Inc.'s new ambulatory care pavilion, as well as the corporate headquarters of large employers like Besche Oil Co. and Chaney Enterprises.

Also in this Waldorf-themed edition:
* Porcari on the proposed Waldorf bypass. *Business* gets up close with John D. Porcari, secretary of the Maryland Department of Transportation. See page 2.

* Waldorf at a glance. A look at the facts about the town. See page 6.

* Shannon's Word. Chamber President Joseph F. Shannon Jr. is excited about planning for Waldorf's future. See page 11.