



COREY PERRINE/STAFF

Karen Bruker stands next to her husband, Dee, as she describes her excitement about moving into their soon-to-be-completed apartment on the 900 block of Broad Street. Their home is above the insurance agency, Sanford, Bruker and Banks, where Dee Bruker has his office.

They never leave work

Business owners in downtown are going back in time

By Gracie Shepherd
Staff Writer

In past centuries, living above the office was part and parcel of owning a downtown business.

Since the advent of the suburbs, business owners have gotten away from this idea. In downtown Augusta, however, a few people still live at work.

John and Ooollee Bricker live above their vintage clothing store on the 1100 block of Broad Street. John has lived there for more than 20 years, and the couple has lived there together for 13 years.

The Bricker apartment is 2,300 square feet and has two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a dining room, kitchen, living room, pool room and all the spaciousness they would have in a house in the suburbs.

The building was at one time a post office, home to Avrett's Hardware, then an antique store before Ooollee opened her clothing store, Vintage Ooollee.

While some business owners may not like the constant accessibility to the office, that's one of downtown's major perks to Ooollee.

"I love what I do, and I love that I'm always right here," she said. "It's comforting."

She does bookkeeping once a week for the Augusta Arts Council and banks at Georgia Bank & Trust and Queensborough Bank & Trust, so there are weeks that she doesn't pull her car out of the parking area they have behind the building.

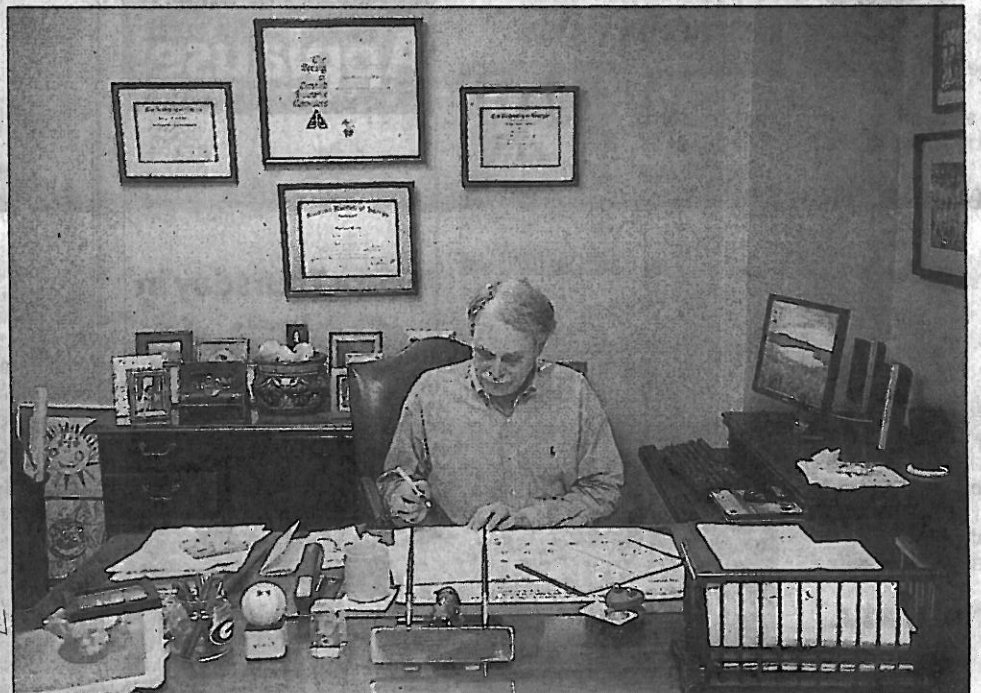
"If we had a grocery store or a drugstore, I'd probably never touch a car," she said.

Moving people downtown, Ooollee said, is the best way to improve downtown's atmosphere and safety, because residents will care about the area more than visitors ever could.

"That's what the whole downtown was originally about," she said. "Everyone who worked downtown lived downtown."

The Brickers simply enjoy living downtown and hope the downtown trend is here to stay.

"I'm a downtown girl; I love it," Ooollee said. "I



Bruker works in his office in the same Broad Street building where he and his wife will soon be living. Once it was common for owners of businesses in downtown Augusta to live where they worked, and some couples are finding that a convenient way to live today.

want more people to live downtown."

Margaret Woodard, the executive director for the Downtown Development Authority, said that demand for downtown living space in general has been high, and she doesn't look for that to change soon.

"We're seeing a tremendous interest in people returning downtown," she said.

On the 900 block of Broad Street, Dee and Karen Bruker are putting the final touches on their apartment above Dee's insurance agency office.

They say they can't wait to be downtown and closer to all the action.

"We've always known we wanted to move down here, and as soon as our daughters were gone, it was time," Karen said. "It's just perfect."

The apartment is up 47 stairs on the third floor of the building, which also houses an architectural firm and Dee's insurance agency, Sanford, Bruker and Banks.

The Brukers' current home is on Monte Sano Avenue, so Dee's commute is already under 10 minutes. Once they move upstairs, it will take even less time.

The building was built about 1905, Dee estimates, and has had many purposes throughout the years.

Upstairs, apartments were a constant theme and the Brukers feel like they're going back to the building's original use.

"We're going back to an old concept, really," Dee said.

The Brukers say they expect more downtown business owners to make the move downtown and look forward to giving a neighborhood feel to downtown Augusta.

"Everyone I talk to is real excited about it. It seems like something they'd want to do, too," Dee said.

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Karen Bruker describes where she wants the grill to go at their soon-to-be-completed home above her husband's office.



Karen Bruker talks to Josh Chambers of Divine Floors. The building has had several purposes since it was built around 1905.