

THE DOWNTOWNERS

West Palm Beach business owners dish about why they're downtown - and why you should be, too!

M meet Bruce Helander, owner of Bruce Helander Studio. A member of the Florida Artists Hall of Fame, he and his wife, Claudia, not only own one of the largest studios in The West Palm Beach Arts & Entertainment District, but also live downtown.

Helander is such an integral figure in Downtown West Palm Beach that Mayor Jeri Muoio declared March 31, 2014 "Bruce Helander Day" and presented him with a Key to the City.

Here, Bruce reflects on the importance of art, moving from "The Island" to downtown, and two decades of revitalization:

How I've seen downtown grow:

"When I came here 20 years ago, there were very few people on the streets, and some areas at the west end of Clematis Street needed security guards out front because it didn't feel safe. Then, people realized that this city was a diamond in the rough that just needed to be polished. They started making renovations, and CityPlace was built. Then apartment buildings and condos started popping up, and that attracted people and businesses. It really took off from there, and it has been a fairly fast-paced growth ever since."

What makes downtown unique to you:

"Vitality is at an all-time high, and a lot of that can be attributed to the CANVAS project, which was Nicole Henry's idea to transform plain downtown exterior walls into,

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essentially, an outdoor museum exhibition by inviting artists to paint large murals at certain sites. These murals communicate the excitement of our community. Downtown West Palm Beach is also a walkable city, and everything I need – personally and professionally – is right here. On top of that, we have Flagler Drive and its beautiful waterfront."

When I love downtown the most:

"I like being at the studio early in the morning and watching the city start to wake up and get moving."

Where I eat downtown:

"There are so many wonderful restaurants, but my favorites are Pistache French Bistro, Paris Bakery & Café, and Kabuki."

Where I shop downtown:

"Pioneer Linens is incredible."

Where I play downtown:

"My favorite place to go after we close for the evening is The Blind Monk. It's a high-class wine bar that is owned by Ben Lubin, who is the son of former West Palm Beach mayor Lois Frankel."

Why I want to be downtown:

"We opened our gallery in



A WORK OF ART: "Artists are part of the charismatic evolution of a city and always play a vital role in its revitalization," says Bruce Helander. PHOTO BY JIM BERIAU

Downtown West Palm Beach in 1994 after 12 years on Worth Avenue. We made the move because we were drawn to the energy we felt in Downtown West Palm Beach, and it had a more creative spirit. It certainly was not what it is now, but I could really sense a tremendous revitalization on the horizon and, thankfully, I was right."

Why you should visit downtown:

"There's such a great collection of bars, restaurants, shops and art. Then there's the Kravis Center and convention center, and it's all concentrated in one area. Every city has its own personality, and Downtown West Palm Beach is now a true destination. It has been a beautiful transformation."

– Keith Merritt

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For the next profile in THE DOWNTOWNERS series, coming in January.