

EDITORIAL

Comeback community

With dedicated residents, the North will rise again

Northland residents, having survived the economic brunt of Columbus' growing pains, have launched a laudable marketing campaign to redeem their community's image.

But the first people they need to persuade might be themselves.

Some in Northland's business community still are kicking around the idea of rebranding the community by changing its name to one that doesn't conjure images of a dead mall and blighted thoroughfare.

Call it what you wish; it still will be Northland. And thank goodness.

It remains a community of lovely, affordable homes and nearby businesses. Its dazzle fizzled; its hopes never did.

Starting with City Center, newer malls siphoned its shoppers. And newer neighborhoods became the trendy address. But Northland is making a civic comeback.

"You're talking about very friendly communities, very walkable communities, relatively safe communities," said George Schmidt, who is spearheading the new promotional campaign.

"Our neighborhood is great. It's vital. It's not gone down the tubes, but you have to reinvent yourself."

Schmidt, former minister and marketing executive, is again in the business of nurturing faith and changing perception.

A website will go live this month, emphasizing Northland's schools, parks, homes and businesses.

The site of the old mall, opened in 1964 and closed in 2002, could have become an 84-acre black hole, swallowing the community in its orbit.

But residents such as Schmidt, president of the Forest Park Civic Association, and Dave Paul, president of the Northland Community Council, kindled hope and lobbied for help.

Efforts are paying off. Northland Village, with retail, residential and office space, is rising. The streetscape has gotten a facelift, with landscaping and lighting.

As other communities fuss and fight, and find themselves ignored or discounted, Northland pulled together with a unified, persistent plea to City Hall. Revitalizing Northland required political clout to leverage investment.

To his credit, Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman – while a city councilman in the mid-1990s – pressed the city to target revitalization of Northland.

If you don't let it get that bad, he reasoned, it's all the easier to save.

This neighborhood finally has as good a shot of success as the Short North or German Village, once disparaged neighborhoods. On one end of Northland is Clintonville; on another is Easton. There's no reason why the points between can't enjoy a similar prosperity.