

What's Up Downtown?: Old post office becoming a new living room for Alton

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - What's Up Downtown?, an event hosted by Alton Main Street, had no intentions of moving from its usual home of Jacoby Center for the Arts, but Tuesday night it did just that.

Tuesday's What's Up Downtown was moved to the old post office building, which was recently donated to Hugh Halter, a Christian minister who recently moved to Alton. Alton Main Street Executive Director Sara McGibany said the event was moved, because she invited Halter to be the featured speaker, and he responded to the invitation with one of his own. He invited McGibany and Alton Main Street to the old post office building.

"This was the first, free, open to the public non-ticketed event to be held here," McGibany said. "They invited us, saying they were ready to host, so we took Hugh up on his offer."

During What's Up Downtown, local community groups and organizations gather to talk about what they are doing, and listen to each other in order to grow a more cohesive city built upon small businesses, beneficial organizations and lots of networking.

Before speaking to those gathered, Halter said the old post office was going to be converted into a new "living room for Alton." He continued that theme with his address to the crowd.

Many have voiced their concerns about Halter, who some view as an "outsider," getting what people believe is one of the best buildings in Alton. Halter assured those gathered, however, that he was striving to be just as much a part of the community as everyone else.

He recounted what brought him and his family to Alton from Denver - an assisted living center for one of his children. On the way to that facility in Godfrey, the Halters passed through Alton.

"As we were passing through Alton, we said, 'what a weird town,'" Halter recalled. "We were pulling flyers and seeing how cheap these beautiful homes were, and we wondered, 'what happened to this town?'"

A daughter of a friend, who they also visited, died, but their son continued living in the Godfrey facility, and the Halters continued to visit. During dinner at Tony's Restaurant, she met someone who assisted with their friend's daughter at Beverly Farms. The Halters were asking what it was like to live in Alton, and asked that person what Alton needed. The woman said Alton needed people to care.

So, the Halters decided to move to Alton. Halter brought his wife and other children, all of whom have settled into the city and are bringing new life into the community.

Following his talk, Halter discussed what was going into the building in a question and answer session, including a basement small business incubator and a coffee roastery, which may open as soon as January. The incubator will open in phases, and is currently awaiting accessibility, such as an elevator and ADA-compliant ramps.

Eventually, the old post office building will bring new life to Alton through fostering both business and economic growth and generally community and fellowship.

"It is very exciting to see one of Downtown Alton's 'white elephant' properties stepping into the new chapter of its life, and I really appreciate Hugh's sentiment that he would like it to become Alton's living room," McGibany said following the event. "I certainly plan on spending a lot of time working from my laptop there, and I look forward to the synergy that will be created when people start to interact with one another in this gorgeous space."



[Steven Spencer also contributed to this story.](#)