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Tearing down, building up

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ST. CHARLES – Phil Kessler had mixed emotions as he watched two historic homes across from his own demolished as part of the First Street Redevelopment Project.

On one hand, it's sad to see his neighborhood change. On the other, Friday's demolition of two Route 31 businesses is making way for progress – namely the new Blue Goose Supermarket.

"It's a bittersweet vision; ... you like to remember things the way they used to be," Kessler said. "But I understand and appreciate the nature of what's going on."

In the six months since ground was broken on the more than \$100 million redevelopment project, crews have made an apparent shift from working largely underground to doing some surface-level work.

Construction on a new 19,500-square-foot retail and residential building already had begun, and tangible evidence of the project is becoming more apparent above ground.

Studio 1894 Bridal & Special Occasions – owned by Kim Schulze and her husband Steve – inhabited one of the historic houses recently razed. The couple had a difficult time watching the house's demolition.

"It was sad, but we knew this was coming," said Steve Schulze. "It was kind of like a car accident. You didn't want to see it, but you had to look."

Though her business is not involved in the future of the First Street Redevelopment Program, Kim Schulze said she looks forward to opening another bridal shop in the Fox Valley in the future.

The second phase of development includes the building of a 54,000-square-foot retail and office building and a 433-space parking deck. Construction on those buildings is expected to start this spring.

In the end, First Street will boast 7.4 acres of retail, residential and commercial properties, nearly 1,000 parking spaces and new streets, sidewalks, landscaping and infrastructure.

Jim Stilling, who watched last week's demolition out the north windows of his business Ricechem, said he, too, has mixed feelings about the project, though he is hoping for the best.

"If the project goes as everyone would hope, it could be a wonderful thing for the City of St. Charles," he said.



Heavy equipment demolishes the second of two houses on Second Street as part of the First Street Redevelopment Project. (Phil Kessler photo)

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