Entrepreneurs can boost Gilbert's Heritage District

By Jim Torgeson

SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

Gilbert has a strong vision for the Heritage District, and it's a great vision.

Keeping the small town feel and look while enticing development isn't really that easy, and the Heritage District has an unusual "egg or chicken" situation; we'd like businesses to move here, but we don't have as many vacancies as you'd think. We have lots of undeveloped land ready for building.

Most people only think of the 200 block of Gilbert Road as the Heritage District, but it really runs from 600 feet south of Elliot Road north to Juniper Avenue and spans, at times, a quartermile each side of Gilbert Road.

If you take the time to look at the whole

district, you will see there's a lot more than meets the eye. If some of the projects that have come up stay online, like Heritage Marketplace (the timeline has been extended by council), it will create new space for leasing and that will give us a solid push forward, along with Postino's opening of the old Grain Belt for two new restaurants.

There are only a few spots available in the 200 block area and rents are low, so it's a great time to start up or move a business to an area that's going to be an attraction.

There are vacancies just to the north of Juniper, where LuLu's Taco Shop and Flancer's Cafe are thriving and you will still be adjacent to the district.

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Businesses looking to move later should contact the people who are developing Heritage Marketplace and they may get locked into a lower lease and help them get occupancy off the ground. Your business may be the one to start that ball rolling!

Gilbert has a strong independent streak that strives for little or no government subsidization, so stepping up and committing a business to this district will continue that tradition.

It will demonstrate how businesses can come together and create vibrancy and growth by the sheer will of its residents and their commitment to the town. This spirit is why our town is great and why so many people make this their home for generations.

So many people have the desire to open a business and this area can be quite accommodating. The fact that the town has put forth time, money and effort into the area should let you know that it's the right place for you to open your dream business.

Whether it's a restaurant, bridal shop, comedy club, toy shop or pet store, the Heritage District will end up being one of the few places in Gilbert where window shopping can still be done.

It won't smack of strip malls but rather a return to small-town shops and the tradition which so many residents desire.

Jim Torgeson is a member of the Gilbert Heritage Redevelopment Commission.