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Cyber cafe to bring new life to landmark

DOWNTOWN NICHOLASVILLE BUILDING TO BE RESTORED

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CENTRAL KENTUCKY BUREAU

NICHOLASVILLE - A downtown spot that once served sundaes and cherry Cokes will soon be restored as a coffee shop with wireless Internet access.

The city of Nicholasville has received a \$146,000 state grant to restore the Hemphill Pharmacy building at the corner of Main and Maple streets, just south of the Jessamine County Courthouse.

The building has been closed since 1998, when the pharmacy shut down after a competitor, CVS Pharmacy, opened two blocks north at Main and Oak.

The grant comes from the Governor's Office for Local Development, which administers state and federal grants, and Renaissance on Main, a state program that seeks to increase economic development in downtowns.

Building owner Bill Jacobs said the grant will be used to restore the building as a coffee shop and bakery on the first floor. The coffee shop will be a cyber cafe, with wireless Internet access.

The building's second floor has already been framed for a couple of two-bedroom apartments that the owner plans to rent out.

Jacobs, who has owned the building for six years, hopes to start restoration in June, and to open the coffee shop and bakery in the fall.

Dan Hemphill opened the original drugstore in 1901. In the early 1900s, the building also housed Nicholasville's post office and a dentist's office.

For years, Hemphill Pharmacy was a gathering spot for Nicholasville teenagers to get cherry Cokes, ice cream and sundaes, said Johnny Collier, a Nicholasville City Council member.

"We would all come down here between Sunday school and church and get a Coke, then went back to church," Collier said. "And after school a bunch of us would come down here. It was kinda like the *Happy Days* bunch."

It's easy for a rapidly growing community like Nicholasville to lose its identity, said Carola Hartley, executive director of Nicholasville Now, the Main Street revitalization program.

"That's why it's so important to preserve it and have things like this happen to downtown," Hartley said.

In addition, she hinted at behind-the-scenes discussions to bring a history museum downtown; to get a community theater program going in the downtown area; and a continuing effort to encourage restaurants to locate there.

Just a few doors down from the Hemphill Pharmacy building is a group of 1800s buildings that burned in a December 2004 fire. Jessamine Fiscal Court purchased those buildings last year, and it plans to preserve their facades and build space for the county attorney's office.

County Attorney Brian Goettl, who is president of Nicholasville Now, said the fiscal court will soon select a construction management firm to oversee that restoration.