

Private office complex coming to Conroe

■ Three buildings downtown first construction of type in 25 years

By **BETH KUHLES**
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

Downtown Conroe is expected to get its first new private office complex in about 25 years.

The D'Agostino Companies, a prominent developer in the community, plans to construct the Town Center Professional Plaza, a three-building garden office complex within walking distance of Conroe City Hall and the Montgomery County Courthouse.

While there have been several renovations of downtown buildings in the recent past, this will be the first new construction of private office space in about 25 years, Downtown Manager Larry Calhoun said.

"He is a pioneer in the downtown area," Calhoun said of the D'Agostino property. "It's another piece of the puzzle. What makes downtown revitalization is primarily a residential base ... and when you have people working in the area."

The D'Agostino Companies plans to offer 25,000 square feet in the three-building complex, located on the site of the old Conroe Independent School District administration building on North Thompson Street and West Lewis. The first building, with 10,000 square feet, is under way and will be leased by

Bleyl & Associates, a Conroe engineering firm. The second two buildings, at 7,500 square feet each, will be constructed once leases are signed with tenants.

Economic incentive

Chris D'Agostino, chief financial officer for the company, said he likes what he sees in downtown, and he hopes to lead new business in locating there. D'Agostino cited the city's efforts to offer unique street and sidewalk pavers as well as underground utilities in the downtown district.

"Somebody's got to be the first," D'Agostino said. "Some people have to be successful to get more businesses to come. I think downtown has so much to offer, with its new buildings and courts. The courts alone will support the new urban growth."

To sweeten the deal for the first new office space, an economic incentive is being negotiated with the Conroe Industrial Development Corp. Marcus Winberry, attorney for the CIDC, said the preliminary agreement is to offer the D'Agostino Companies \$78,000 over seven years for the project.

The deal is being finalized with the CIDC and will be presented to the Conroe City Council for approval.

The deal would be funded through a half-cent sales tax collected in the city by CIDC for economic development.

"Any time you do revitalization or redevelopment, incentives always bring people into an area," D'Agostino said. "While it is a blessing, it is not

going to make or break the project."

The upscale offices, which will be built in a garden setting featuring trees and planters, will be Class A office space and could be used by many professionals, including lawyers, insurance companies, accountants and title companies, D'Agostino said.

The professionals from these buildings will offer a real boom for downtown businesses, including local retail stores and restaurants.

"They will shop here in the drugstores downtown, like the CVS and Walgreens," Calhoun said. "They will come to the restaurants. They will have higher incomes and more discretionary funds. That will benefit everyone."

Downtown revitalization

Calhoun said the downtown revitalization continues with other projects as well. The Conroe City Council has approved \$1.4 million to renovate the old Elections Central Building into a 250-seat theater for the Crigh-ton Players, adding a second entertainment venue to the downtown area.

The county also is planning a new courts building and parking garage across from Conroe City Hall. In addition, eight new loft units are expected to open within two months in an old refurbished hotel at Collins and San Jacinto Street. A new catering business and wedding hall recently opened on the Square, across the street from the Montgomery County Courthouse.