

NEWSMAKER

After a community saved Patterson, he spends a career returning the favor

Jasper, Mo., saved Greg Patterson's life.

At least that's the way Patterson, the owner of a Kansas City commercial real estate firm and the Uptown Arts Bar, tells it.

By the time his parents divorced in 1962, Patterson had been uprooted several times because his father, an epileptic with psychological problems, dealt with "issues" by moving.

"I was an only child whose life was constantly being disrupted," Patterson recalled. "As that occurred, I became less and less self-confident. And by the time we reached Springfield, we had to live on the wrong side of the tracks because we were so poor, so I was discriminated against and bullied."

Then, soon after he turned 12, his parents split up, and he and his mother moved in with his maternal grandmother in Jasper, a tiny town 130 miles south of Kansas City on Interstate 49.

"I was a very troubled, very depressed child when we moved to Jasper," he said. "I was withdrawn, wouldn't go to school, was afraid of pretty much everything. But I was really saved, not in the Christian sense, but literally saved by that town, the townspeople and the way I was embraced by all these people."

And that, he said, helps explain why he has been dedicated throughout his career to helping foster a strong sense of community — not in small towns, but in the neighborhoods of Kansas City.

Leaving the law

Patterson had planned to become a lawyer. But while completing his bachelor's degree in the thick of the anti-war, civil-rights and feminist movements, he said, "I got engaged in those movements of the day and making the world a better place."

Therefore, after getting drafted, serving in the Army ROTC and entering law school, Patterson quickly decided he hated the latter as much as he'd hated the Army. So he dropped out of law school, earned a master's in community de-



Greg Patterson is president of Greg Patterson & Associates.

▶ GREG PATTERSON

Title: President, Greg Patterson & Associates; owner, Uptown Arts Bar

Family: Wife, Beth Burnett; son, Benton, 25; daughter, Katie, 24
Education: Bachelor's in political science and economics, Drury University, 1972; master's in community development, University of Missouri, 1979

Hobbies: Civic involvement in urban Kansas City, reading, storytelling, performing arts, traveling, history.

velopment and landed a job as a community development specialist in Kansas City.

While working in that capacity from 1974-77, Patterson helped create an East Side community development corporation patterned after Westport Tomorrow, a successful CDC and coalition of business and community groups in Midtown.

"So when Westport Tomorrow's executive director was leaving, they sought me out," said Patterson, who led that organization from 1977-83.

At that point, a connection Patterson helped forge led to the beginning of his commercial real estate career.

Brokering his first deal

One day, Bill Ard, a Wichita self-storage pioneer and frontier trails buff, walked into the Westport Tomorrow office and told Patterson he was looking for a Santa Fe Trail site where he could develop his dream hotel, the Quarterage. One of Patterson's board members was Brice Harris, then vice chancellor for Metropolitan Community Colleges. So Patterson happened to know that MCC planned to vacate its headquarters and build a new one atop the Penn Valley Community College parking garage.

After Patterson put

Ard and Harris together, a \$1.25 million deal was struck for the former MCC headquarters site, Patterson said, and his Westport Tomorrow board president, Westport Bank President Dudley McElvain, who witnessed the transaction, made an interesting comment afterward.

"Dudley told me, 'If you had been a commercial real estate broker in that deal, you'd have received half a commission — \$37,000, give or take,'" Patterson said. "I said, 'For what?' And he said: 'For what you did. You got a buyer and seller together, and they made a deal.'"

At the time, Patterson was devoting 80 hours a week to his nonprofit job, which paid him \$25,000 a year, he said, "and I was burned out." So he accepted an offer to put his exten-

sive knowledge about local people and places to work for Lou Steele, another Westport Tomorrow board member who was starting up an urban commercial real estate branch for the Eugene D. Brown Co.

A career of niches

Now a 33-year real estate veteran, Patterson operated Greg Patterson & Associates under the corporate umbrella of Lou Steele and Don Maddux's Prudential Commercial Real Estate Services from 1999 until 2007, when Patterson became an independent broker.

As such, his four-person firm has typically averaged more than 50 transactions a year, and Patterson ranked No. 26 on the Kansas City Business Journal's recent list of "commercial real estate heavy hitters" based on his \$7 million in 2016 deals.

Patterson said his success has been due, in part, to his focus on a couple of niches, including urban-core neighborhoods such as the Historic 18th & Vine Jazz District and Uptown.

With help from one of his brokers, Forestine Beasley, Patterson recently landed the job of leasing 16,000 square feet of vacant city-owned commercial space in the jazz district, and they've already signed two leases. The first is with Armon Lasker, who will relocate his Directors Cut barbershop to 1,300

square feet at 1708 E. 18th St. from its flood-prone site on 103rd Street. The second is with Ethnic Arts Interiors, which will be relocating to 1,284 square feet at 1516 E. 18th St. from 5930 Troost Ave.

"The most important (vacancy to fill) is the corner endcap that was formerly The Peachtree Restaurant, which is 7,600 square feet," Patterson said. "Our goal as the lease marketing agent is to get the right mix of tenants — primarily retail, restaurant and entertainment users."

Elevating Uptown

Patterson already has made a big impact in Uptown, where he owns the historic Barclay Building, 3613-3623 Broadway, which houses his brokerage and iPho Tower restaurant. It is one of four adjacent Patterson-owned properties that total 37,000 square feet and make up the Broadway Uptown Center.

Another of them, the Betsy Ross Building, housed a series of failed nightclubs before Patterson stepped in.

"After the last one collapsed, I put the (liquor) license in my name," he said, "because it is in an area where there are density limitations on taverns, meaning that if I lost that license, I couldn't get it back."

With programming help from his friends in the arts community, Patterson

reopened the space at 3611 Broadway as the Uptown Arts Bar in 2012.

"It's never made money. But now it's gotten to the point where it breaks even, and it's become sort of my love."

The venue, which hosted 77 shows in August, emphasizes original and experimental acts that are unjuried and uncensored, "so we're edgy and radically accepting," Patterson said.

Still connected to nonprofits

In addition to focusing on urban-core real estate, Patterson's brokerage specializes in working with nonprofits.

When asked what deal he was most proud of, he pointed to the 1980s establishment of the Hope Care Center, a skilled-nursing facility for AIDS patients at 83rd and Main streets.

Dr. Sharon Lee of Southwest Boulevard Family Health was the point person for the project, which was launched after AIDS patient advocates "got tired of watching these people die without getting good care" due to rejection by existing facilities, Patterson said.

He found a building to house the nursing center but didn't stop there. He also became Hope Care Center's treasurer and led the effort to raise nearly \$1.5 million to renovate the building.

"I know if it wouldn't have been for me, it wouldn't have opened," Patterson said, "because I also was able to work with the late Gov. Carnahan to get a special Medicaid rate set because it cost more to take care of people with AIDS. We also were able to get an exception to Missouri's moratorium on new licenses for nursing home beds."

Asked where he came by his compassion for others, Patterson said, "I was raised by the most accepting human being I've ever known — my mother."

And he teared up as he remembered her and the good old days in Jasper.

- Rob Roberts