



Emily Lewis, a real estate agent with Robert Wood Realty Co., carries a “for sale” sign to her car before going out to post it. Kevin Manning | Post-Dispatch

# Real estate agent revels in the boom in downtown St. Louis living

By Repps Hudson  
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

If you stand at the corner of 20th Street and Washington Avenue and look north, you’ll see Emily Lewis’ name and cell phone number on a three-story banner advertising the Majestic Stove Lofts, three joined brick buildings that date back about a century.

If you lower your eyes to street level, you might see Lewis whiz by on her 49-cc Yamaha Zuma scooter, sans helmet — because that’s what the law allows for such small-engine conveyances.

“I use it to ride around downtown. I’m not scared of it. I grew up on motorcycles,” said this urban pioneer, who now lives “way out” near Tower Grove Park.

She spent two years in a rental apartment on Washington Avenue at a time before living and playing downtown became the thing it is today. “I lived downtown before it was cool,” Lewis said.

In those days, her office was the Washington Avenue Post, an Internet cafe and gift store on Washington between 13th and 14th streets.

“That’s the neighborhood hub,” said Lewis. “That was my office. They have Wi-Fi in the back. I’d set up my laptop and go to work. Everybody working on projects here stopped in there. That’s how I got to know the people here.”

This small-town girl from Clinton, Mo., south of Kansas City, is having the time of her life as downtown St. Louis shakes off the doldrums with new lofts, condos and rental units.

First, she learned a few things about restaurant and hotel management while with Hyatt, then got her real estate license so she could be-

come an agent.

“I did what I was supposed to do,” she said. “Now I’m doing what I want to do.”

Lewis’ cell phone rings constantly, and, as she puts it, “I don’t meet a stranger.”

Like a lot of people in downtown real estate these days, Lewis is a booster of the rental and sales market. At Robert Wood Realty Co., she’s in charge of renting 120 units in the three adjoining buildings. She says she has rented 70 units so far, yet adds, “We’re a little behind schedule.”

While downtown renters and buyers come from outside the St. Louis area as well as the suburbs and span the age and income demographics, Lewis believes some potential residents are reluctant to try city living.

Others, however, sell their suburban homes and their furniture and settle down in a former hat or clothing factory, stock it with new furniture and start life anew. Some, Lewis said, try renting to see if they want to buy a downtown loft or condo.

## Is this revival of downtown the real thing or another false start?

We’ve come a long way, and these buildings are filling up. When the people from West County will be able to come down here and go out and buy groceries and get all the other things they need, we’ll be there. People had to build up these old buildings before businesses would begin to fill up the first-floor retail space. That’s happening now.

## Why would anyone move downtown? That’s a big step.

It’s the excitement of a totally new lifestyle. They want a new place. It’s so totally different than a cookie-cut-

## Emily Lewis

**Position:** Leasing specialist and licensed real estate agent

**Age:** 27

**Employer:** Robert Wood Realty Co.

**Education:** Bachelor of science degree in hospitality and restaurant management, Southwest Missouri State University, 2001

**Experience:** Corporate trainee and wedding planner, Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa & Casino; convention services manager, Hyatt Regency Hotel, St. Louis; real estate agent, St. Louis Premier Realtors in Soulard; moved to Robert Wood Realty in December 2005.

**Family:** Single

ter lifestyle in the suburbs. It’s daring. It’s almost like doing something you’re not supposed to do.

Why would you want something with concrete floors, instead of carpet? [Lewis asked rhetorically]. Majestic Stove Lofts are very New York-edgy. Some people like that.

## What’s next?

We need to connect downtown. Historically, transportation is what changes communities. We’re working on how to make everything more accessible — to get to a Cards game, a Blues game, to work at SBC.

The transportation schedule has to be good. It has to be immaculate.

## Is there a conflict coming between the new urbanists and the homeless people who live in the parks?

People don’t want to live next to bums. I did when I lived on Washington. But they don’t hurt anyone.

rhudson@post-dispatch.com | 314-340-8208