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Empty nesters flock to downtown condos

Sunday, August 12, 2007

By **Lindsay Vanhulle**
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- John and Jean Nieuwenhuis' seventh-floor downtown condominium offers breathtaking views of Grand Rapids' city center.

And the couple is just a short elevator ride to the rooftop deck at Cityview Condominiums, 60 Monroe Center NW, where the tops of skyscrapers are at eye level.

It's a different world from the suburban Rockford home where the Nieuwenhuises raised their two daughters -- now in their 20s and living in their own downtown condos.

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And that's why they like it.

"When we got home from work, we tended to work on the lawn or stay in our area," Jean Nieuwenhuis said. "Now, we're here in the city. It is our home."

"It truly is a lifestyle change, not just an address change."

The Nieuwenhuis family is a fine example of what downtown developers and market analysts say is the face of the 21st century condo market: empty nesters of the baby-boom generation and their children, 20-something millennials.

Both groups want to be close to shopping, dining and recreation, as well as for the numerous amenities developers add to compete for buyers.

"You don't have as many families looking for the single-family, detached house in the suburbs anymore," said Laurie Volk, a Clinton, N.J.-based market analyst who has studied Grand Rapids. "It's a renaissance of the city across the United States."

The downtown residential development push began here in the 1980s with the formation of the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority, leading to the construction of Plaza Towers on West Fulton Street.

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