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## Letting go of special places takes belief in better tomorrows

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The view from the 18th floor of the big building skeleton on the southeast corner of Broadway and Hildebrand is, in a word, cool.

On a clear afternoon, the Tower of the Americas and the other landmark buildings of downtown San Antonio look like an orderly pile of spiky toys in the distance. The sprawling golf course nearby looks like a well-tended backyard. The gothic vibe of the University of the Incarnate Word's spires and the somewhat creepy looming of the old BAMC hospital are imperceptible from this vantage point, but who knew there was so much green around here?

OK, Brackenridge Park is nearby. But most of the trees are rooted in people's yards. A lot are on the Incarnate Word campus. There are tons on Fort Sam Houston. Even the little green area behind the Chipotle. The treetops are plentiful, and they are everywhere.

And big bad Broadway? It looks like just another buzzing residential street.

In fact, the view is almost cool enough to make one forget the public outcry in 2005, when Earl Abel's Restaurant — the former tenant of that attractive chunk of real estate — announced it would soon serve its last chicken leg and slice of pie. Remember that? Those Earl Abel's faithful were more steamed than the vegetables, and it wasn't just the idea of missing out on the eats that had 'em crying out; it was the sense that a piece of San Antonio's nostalgia, a piece of our collective S.A. soul was being razed and sold in the form of big-ticket condos.

But now we've got a new vantage point. Fewer than five years down the line, we can look north and see a new Earl Abel's Restaurant serving up lunch and dinner specials only about two miles away. And back on Broadway and Hildebrand, where the luxury condos are slowly starting to take shape, the promise of a revitalized Broadway is coming into focus.

During a recent shindig at The Broadway, Mike Reddell, the marketing executive charged with showcasing The Broadway's sparkling selling points, described a retail, pedestrian-friendly, tree-lined future here; he sees the building becoming a San Antonio landmark 20 years down the road. Think that's wishful thinking? I got a pair of big cowboy boots to sell you.

Those of us who remember when The Giant Justins were the latest thing probably also remember the smell of freshly baked bread wafting from the Butter Krust bakery, and the buttered slices of heaven you'd get during class field trips there. The bakery is gone, but up the road Central Market smells pretty heavenly on any given day.

Which brings us back to change. It's hard to let go of a beloved past because of the charm and the memories; our first instinct is to protect it mama-lion style. And the fear of trading celebrated local treasures for impersonal hotspots with buffed steel tabletops that are just as fab in San Francisco as they are in Chicago or Miami is understandable. S.A. has a pretty good thing going on, and it's worth protecting.

But we also want to develop and grow — controlled, planned development and growth. It's nuts not to want those economic perks for those little San Antonians currently stuck in a Butter Krust bakery-less elementary school experience.

That's why we need to use the example of this vantage point — the still-humming, saved-by-the-diners Earl Abel's; the quickly rising high-dollar condos; the promise of leisurely window shopping along those tree-lined future sidewalks — to remind us that there are ways to hold on to our history while still growing and cultivating expectations of a prosperous tomorrow.

One doesn't need to be on the 18th floor of a high-rise to see where one wants to go.

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