

WITH VIDEO: Next chapter

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A building shuffle is taking place in midtown Harrisburg.

Eric Papenfuse sold his [Midtown Scholar](#) bookstore property at 1519 N. Third St. to Harrisburg-based urban developer [Powers & Associates](#).

Papenfuse is moving his store into bigger digs about two blocks south, at 1302 N. Third

St., across from the Broad Street Market. Renovation work will begin any day on Papenfuse's new building. He expects to wrap up construction in about three months.

Powers & Associates is not sure what its plans are for the 3,000-square-foot former Midtown Scholar building, across from Harrisburg Area Community College's (HACC) midtown campus, said Matt Tunnell, senior vice president of the firm.

Papenfuse said HACC might use the space as a bookstore.

Papenfuse closed Midtown Scholar three weeks ago. Its new home, most recently known as Fissel & Company, a used-furniture and antique store, will give Papenfuse more than three times the amount of space he had. He would not say for how much he bought or sold the buildings.

He will use the open, cavernous 10,000-square-foot building to house about 100,000 volumes of books, open a café, install wrap-around balconies lined with books, add reading nooks and build a bigger performance stage for debates, lectures and book discussions.

Walls that hide staircases will be ripped out to give the building more of an open loft feel, Papenfuse said. A stairwell that leads to what will be a second-floor art gallery/lounge will be replaced with stairs salvaged from a Baltimore hotel.

Papenfuse said he plans to spend several hundred thousand dollars getting the four-floor building back into shape. The art gallery will open onto an outdoor balcony with seating and views of the midtown market district, the state Capitol and the state museum.

The balcony will sit atop an old, steel marquee sign. Before Fissel & Company and a department store existed at the address, an old movie theater occupied the building. The theater had burned down and was rebuilt in the 1950s. The building still screams that era, and Papenfuse plans to keep some of that vintage charm.

He plans to put a retro neon sign atop the marquee that reads: "Midtown." The sign will also have the Midtown Scholar's book logo affixed to it. He also plans to keep an old glass display case out front to announce events at the bookstore and in midtown. He is going to keep the red "Boston Store" logo etched into the concrete out front, too. Department stores were once referred to as "Boston Stores," Papenfuse said.

Several large glass windows out front are covered. Papenfuse wants to restore the panes so customers can look out and the community can look in. The café will sit just inside the large glass panes on the right side of the building.

The café will be called the "Famous Reading Café." The café's logo mimics the classic "Famous Reading Anthracite" signs once found all over the state. Papenfuse admittedly repurposed the logo for his café that will serve coffee, sandwiches and other light food.

The purchase came with a 21-space parking lot diagonal to the back of the building. Customers will be able to use the lot.

As for the building's last owner, Chip Fissel closed his business Aug. 23 after 18 years. He used the basement of the concrete-and-steel building to re-upholster furniture and sold an array of antiques, books and knick knacks throughout the rest of the building.

Fissel said he didn't know what his plans would be.

"(Papenfuse) was the right person at the right time," Fissel said as he packed up some of the last of his unsold inventory.

Papenfuse will line the basement walls with books and will install a small kitchen on a connecting floor in the rear of the building that will be used to make items sold at the café.

Papenfuse is also trying to buy the building next door at North Third and Verbeke streets. A small market occupies the first floor of the building that dates to the late 19th century.

Papenfuse said he doesn't have immediate plans for the adjoining building if he winds up owning it. He wants to spruce up the outside of the Midtown Scholar with landscaping and continue it down and around the corner of the neighboring building.

Papenfuse couldn't contain his excitement about his relocation as he stood outside and pointed out plans for his building and possibilities for the rest of midtown Harrisburg.



He envisions a resurgence in midtown, which has gone downhill in the past 20 years. Midtown used to be a bustling area filled with shops and people, he said.

Papenfuse believes the resurgence will continue south and north up to HACC, where a string of other developments are taking place. Looking south, he noted the development of the Midtown Arts Center under development a block south on Third Street. He considers his building an extension of the Broad Street Market, which he sees more potential for, too.

"We're about two years away from everything," Papenfuse said. "We like the challenge. (Midtown) has great potential."

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Bookstore base

Midtown Scholar bookstore is moving from 1519 N. Third St. to a larger building at about two blocks south at 1302 N. Third St., across the street from the Broad Street Market.



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