



Owners of
EVO Pizza
Matt McIntosh
and Ricky Hacker



REVITALIZED PARK CIRCLE GETS ITS GROOVE BACK

By Dennis Quick

How does Ricky Hacker feel about North Charleston's Park Circle neighborhood?

"I love it," says the 26-year-old Hacker, who with business partner Matt McIntosh, 30, owns Evo Pizzeria on East Montague Avenue in the old North Charleston business district, the heartbeat of the revitalized Park Circle area.

"It's a safe, tightly knit, diverse community," Hacker says of Park Circle. "And it's relatively inexpensive. You can get a house for under \$200,000."

Hacker and McIntosh began Evo as a mobile pizzeria, a wood-burning oven on wheels that traveled to farmers' markets and special events throughout the state. Their pizza's popularity grew to the point where the two entrepreneurs needed a permanent home for their product. In January, they set up operations in their present East Montague building, built circa 1940 by their landlord's father.

Business is going gangbusters, with 70 percent of the customers being neighborhood residents, Hacker says, adding that he and McIntosh couldn't have picked a better location than Park Circle, where young people in their 20s and 30s are settling.

This scenario is a 180-degree turnaround from how things used to be in Park Circle. In the mid-1990s, when the nearby Charleston Naval Base and shipyard closed, nearly 15,000 jobs got wiped out, and many of those jobs were held by workers who lived in Park Circle. The neighborhood began falling apart.

Then the Noisette Company announced its plans to work with the city of North Charleston to revitalize the Navy base. The goal was, and is, to transform the base into a hub of creativity, attracting artists, artisans, knowledge-based and environmentally-friendly businesses, plus retailers and restaurants, not to mention young residents.

Noisette's influence spread outward, and Park Circle became a magnet for young couples looking to buy their first home and for the region's burgeoning "creative class" – artists, filmmakers, writers, designers, and, of course, entrepreneurs like Hacker.

Simply put, Park Circle is the place to be.

"People are just digging it," Hacker says.