

Loft dwellers

Find nearly everything they need downtown

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Chad and Lisa Wiles aren't as worried about gas prices and car maintenance as most of America. Neither is Sally Mitchell.

The Wileses – who live in the Fire Street Lofts – walk just about everywhere they go, with the exception of work, which is only a 12-minute ride on a “good” traffic day in Knoxville. Mitchell, who lives in the same building, has it even better – she works from home.

“If we only had a grocery store, we would probably never get in the car,” she says.

However, Kimberly Dixon Hamilton, who lives in Keystone Place with her husband, Trey, counter that argument. The owner of Downtown Realty says she and her assistant U.S. attorney husband find a lot of their foodstuffs at the twice-weekly Farmer's Market on Market Square.

“For the most part, we find everything we need downtown,” says Hamilton. “Everything” includes the post office, bank, restaurants, shoe repair and ample social opportunities.

Hamilton describes a “perfect Saturday” as going to the Y for a spinning class, getting coffee, having breakfast at Market Square and visiting the Farmer's Market, open Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

“You can spend hours there shopping, visiting, watching families and their pets. It's just wonderful.”

Each has a car, although Kimberly's work keeps her downtown and Trey walks to his work place. While many people worry about the parking situation downtown, the couple park their cars in a city lot for “about a dollar a day,” Hamilton says.

The city has been fantastic, and really supports and contributes to the great quality of life we have here.”

Kimberly and Trey have lived downtown since moving to Knoxville in 2002, which

is the same year Mitchell moved from a multiacre lakefront property to a downtown condo.

She says she has “enjoyed every minute of it,” even when her condo burned in 2005.

“There was no question we would stay – it was not a hard decision to make. Downtown Knoxville has a tremendous drawing power.”

Mitchell had lived in the Knoxville area since 1986 and was previously a faculty member with the UT College of Veterinary Medicine (she now works in private practice as a veterinary radiologist.) Despite those ties, she says, “I really didn't know much about the history or about the city until I moved downtown.

“There is a sense of industry in what is a wonderful urban setting. There has been stuff going on forever, and living here helps me understand my town.”

For example, she says she never really appreciated the World's Fair Park, “but now, after I run, I walk through that park every day.”

On call seven days a week – “obviously people don't plan for their animals to be sick” – Mitchell has still managed to form a daily routine that includes working, then going into the city for coffee and to say hello to people she has come to know.

She says living downtown has redefined her sense of community and friendships.

“There is a tremendous sense of community that you just don't get in the suburbs,” Mitchell says of Fire Street Lofts. “[Here] you see people in a way you don't when you live right next door to them.” Chad Wiles agrees.

“We have made some really, really good



friends from various age groups,” he says, noting the social aspect of living downtown is an asset. From the Tennessee Theater, Sundown in the City concerts, shops and the University of Tennessee, to numerous restaurants and taverns, “it seems there is always something to do, or something new to support.

“A lot of times, we just decide to go outside to see what is going on.”

And, apparently, that is a long list.

“Every month, it seems a new shop or new movie theater opens,” says Hamilton, whose statement was reinforced by an announcement earlier this month that the new Regal Riviera Stadium 8 will open Aug. 31.

The heart of the city has proven to be as attractive to families, too. A recent News Sentinel article listed about 20 families with children who live downtown, enjoying the proximity to libraries, museums and parks.

“It's a great place to raise a family – it is just a great place for anyone,” says Hamilton, who champions downtown in person and on her Web site, www.knoxvilledowntownrealty.com.

“I love to promote downtown,” she says. “I hope to have a family and stay downtown always.”