



Alan DeLisle, executive director of the Downtown Development Corp., is shown on Main Street with the Humana Building and the Kentucky Center in the background.

ROW-BATH/BUSINESS FIRST

BACK FROM THE BRINK

Determination helped Alan DeLisle return to lead downtown agency after accident

ALAN DELISLE

Executive director,

Downtown

Development

Corp.

Birth date: March

25, 1960

Wife: Kim DeLisle

Daughters: Alexa,

19, Alaina, 15

Hometown:

Buffalo, N.Y., area

Residence: Galt

House Hotel,

downtown

Louisville

Education:

degree in

communications/

journalism, St.

John Fisher

College,

Rochester, N.Y.,

1982; master's

degree in political

science, State

University of New

York at Albany,

1985

Hobbies: Reading

history, playing

drums in a jazz

ensemble |

BY JOHN R. KARMAN III | STAFF WRITER

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March 3, 2009, is a day Alan DeLisle can't remember, but it affected his life in ways he'll never be able to forget.

Having come here just weeks prior to lead Louisville's Downtown Development Corp., DeLisle had made it a priority to tour many of the city's office buildings and historic structures.

On that early March day, he was visiting the Fort Nelson building at Eighth and Main streets with DDC deputy director Patti Clare when a stairway collapsed, causing serious injuries to both and minor injuries to property owner Paul Bariteau.

Clare suffered a badly broken leg and other injuries. DeLisle was in even worse condition.

He was transported to University Hospital, where he was diagnosed with a severe brain

injury. He spent three days there in a coma.

Recovery was difficult, painful

After a week, DeLisle was flown back to Durham, N.C., where he had lived and worked for seven years in a variety of economic development roles before accepting the DDC executive director's post in February 2009. His family had not moved to Louisville.

In Durham, he went through a difficult and painful recovery process that took more than a year.

Slowly, he began to regain his memory, which had been almost entirely lost.

Through intense therapy, he relearned how to walk and talk and rediscovered his motor skills. He overcame double vision, which lasted for nine months.

Doctors weren't optimistic

DeLisle compares his brain following the

accident to an Etch A Sketch toy that had been shaken and erased. Everything had to be painstakingly recreated, bit by bit.

"It was just a process," DeLisle said matter-of-factly.

Still, the prognosis for a full recovery was not good. DeLisle's doctors told him that of people with the kind of traumatic brain injury that he had sustained, only 3 percent to 5 percent were able to return to the lives they previously had led.

'Unfinished business'

But he was determined, and DeLisle came back to Louisville last spring to lead the DDC on a part-time basis. By summer, he was back at it full time.

Throughout his therapy, there was never a doubt in DeLisle's mind that he would return,

DELISLE | P18

WHAT IS THE DDC?

The Downtown Development Corp. is a local private, nonprofit organization charged with improving the city's urban core through economic development, strategic planning and

project management.

Its main goal is job creation, according to executive director Alan DeLisle, and it relies heavily on establishing public-private partnerships.

The DDC has five employees and one city worker assigned to it.

It is governed by a 34-member board and has a \$1.4 million annual budget. |

Service to community has been hallmark of DeLisle's career

DE LISLE | FROM P17

he said, although he still struggles some with his balance, eyesight and occasional memory lapses.

"I felt like I had something that I didn't accomplish," he explained. "It was unfinished business. I wanted to have an impact (in Louisville). I felt like I didn't have that opportunity."

Making an impact

Since returning last year, DeLisle has helped oversee the creation of the plaza and the streetscapes surrounding the new KFC Yum! Center, compiled and released an extensive report about the state of downtown, and begun putting together a commercial loan fund for small businesses that are trying to get established or expand in the city's urban core.

DeLisle and the DDC work on a regular basis with Greater Louisville Inc., the metro chamber of commerce, on business recruitment and development. He also is raising funds from area foundations to produce a new downtown master plan, and he's engaged in talks with University of Louisville officials about their plans for a downtown life-sciences park and how it will connect with the center city.

In perhaps his most visible role to date, DeLisle helped broker the deal for developer Todd Blue to sell some of the so-called Iron Quarter buildings to Louisville investors Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown, who plan to transform the derelict properties into offices and space for other business uses.

"My favorite part of the job is taking a very complicated project and putting the puzzle

together to make it happen," DeLisle said.

An ability to encourage conversation

Gant Hill, a commercial real estate broker who concentrates on the downtown area, said he is impressed by DeLisle's efforts. Both serve on the board of another local nonprofit, the Louisville Downtown Management District, which is responsible for promoting and beautifying the city's central business district.

"The thing about him that is so great is that he encourages conversation," Hill said of DeLisle. "It seems like everything he does is in the best interest of the community. He doesn't take anything for granted."

Politics lead back to hometown

DeLisle, 51, is a native of the Buffalo, N.Y., area who discovered a love for economic development and political processes at an early age. After earning bachelor's and master's degrees in his home state, he worked in several political positions for New York State Sen. Anthony Masiello in the capitol city, Albany.

When Masiello was elected mayor of Buffalo in 1994, DeLisle followed him back to his hometown and worked in his administration, eventually leading all community and economic development efforts.

DeLisle was president of the Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corp., the city's development agency, from 1998 until 2002.

Leading Durham's redevelopment

With Masiello in his final term as Buffalo's mayor, DeLisle said, he was pondering his future when he was contacted by a recruitment firm pitching an opportunity to work for the city of Durham.

In the North Carolina city, he oversaw the

redevelopment of downtown tobacco warehouses, the creation of a performing arts center and the renovation of the Durham Bulls' minor-league baseball stadium.

He also was involved with the continued growth of Durham's famed Research Triangle Park, one of the most prominent high-tech research and development centers in the United States.

Louisville opportunity provides

private-sector employment

Coming to Louisville helped DeLisle fulfill his goal of working in the private sector. He had never been here, prior to interviewing for the DDC position.

But he knew of the emergence of the city's medical center and had heard former Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson speak about his economic development plans and was impressed by his vision.

Since moving here, DeLisle said, he has been pleased with what he has seen of Louisville's downtown, although he admits there still is "some work to do" on the job-creation front.

Separation from family remains a challenge

DeLisle's biggest regret about relocating to Louisville is that — because of his accident — his family has yet to join him here.

During the year he was recovering, his youngest daughter, Alaina, 15, started high school in Durham, and he and his wife of 21 years, Kim DeLisle, have decided not to uproot the family at this point.

The DeLisles also have an older daughter, Alexa, 19, who will be a junior this fall at the University of North Carolina.

The family tries to get together at least

NOT MISSING THE NORTH

Despite living most of his life in New York state, Alan DeLisle doesn't miss the snowy winters of his native Buffalo area. (Although he does miss cheering for his hometown teams, the Buffalo Bills and Sabres.)

Moving to Durham, N.C., in the summer of 2002 was a shock to his system.

"I remember my first day ... on the job in Durham," he recalled. "I got out of my car, and I thought my lungs had blown up. It was in July." |

twice a month, with Alan DeLisle driving or flying from Louisville to Durham. Sometimes, they meet somewhere in between.

"We are really trying to make the best of it," said Kim DeLisle, acknowledging the difficulty of the situation. "We're just kind of taking it one step at a time."

'Beating the odds'

Kim DeLisle, who works as a consultant to nonprofit groups, said her husband's accident had a profound impact on the whole family.

Staying in Durham has provided some much-needed stability for her and her daughters, she said. "Our life was in complete upheaval for a year and a half.

"Life as we knew it was no longer going to be," she added. "We had to create a new norm for us."

Still, Kim DeLisle said, she is proud of the strides made by her husband, whom she described as a man "defined by his career."

"He's beating the odds, which is amazing, but he's very, very, very determined. Life doesn't come as easy to him now, but it doesn't stop him." |



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