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CALIFORNIA

Lofty Dreams of Downtown Living

Thousands turn out for weekend open houses.

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February 28, 2005

David Stokes, 48, said he has always dreamed of living in downtown Los Angeles in an apartment with a city view. The architect imagined riding a scooter to his office east of Little Tokyo.

Stokes said he especially loved the Romanesque Pacific Electric building, the city's first skyscraper.

"There are larger windows and an airy feeling," he said Sunday. The area around the building at 6th and Main streets "has really improved from what it used to be like," Stokes said. "Before, you'd be scared. Hopefully, it'll keep improving."

Stokes and a steady stream of others flowed in and out of 13 apartment and condominium buildings holding open houses this weekend.

Red carpets and balloons invited couples young and old into furnished models and bare concrete caverns. Computer screens generated virtual tours. Friends marveled to each other as they surveyed the city from large, square-paned windows

"We got 7,000 people to come down and take a look," said Carol Schatz, president and chief executive of the Downtown Center Business Improvement District. "Five years ago, I think we wouldn't have gotten one soul down there."

Interest in lofts is part of a downtown renaissance spurred by the construction of Staples Center and Walt Disney Concert Hall, Schatz said. From 1999 to 2004, 4,000 residential units became available, she said. An additional 6,000 are planned.

Over the weekend, the Pacific Electric Lofts at 6th and Main streets rented 10 to 15 units and the

Gas Company Lofts at 8th and Flower streets rented 25 to 30 apartments, she said.

Many visitors, however, said they were not yet ready to commit. For the last couple of years, Ele and Larry Zaiden have been considering trading in their spacious house in the hills of Studio City for a trendy loft in downtown Los Angeles.

Standing outside Santee Court at 7th and Los Angeles streets, Ele Zaiden said she and her grown daughters already shop in the Garment District and the Jewelry District. The 59-year-old relished the idea of being able to walk there.

"The last one started at \$1 million 60," Ele Zaiden said. "It looked gorgeous, mind you. But it ought to be."

And they weren't totally convinced about the neighborhood yet. "It's fine during the day," said Larry Zaiden, 63. "And in the future, maybe it would be OK."

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