

WORCESTER

In Worcester, a new socially and digitally connected community is emerging in the city's downtown

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About two dozen people gathered in the lobby of the Bancroft building in downtown Worcester on a March evening, chowing down on ramen and spicy dynamite chicken from Stix Noodle Bar.

The meet-up was one of several events put on by The Grid District for its residents each month -- and one of the ways the downtown apartment development is using mobile applications, including [Doorbell.Me](#) and [FoodSquire](#), to connect with residents and connect those residents with each other.



The Grid District, which began renovating a handful of downtown buildings in 2016, has integrated the apps into the fabric of its community. When residents move in, they get a door hanger promoting FoodSquire - a new food delivery service that often collaborates on Doorbell's events.

And in addition to hosting events for residents, Doorbell also allows residents to connect through its app. For example, residents can use Doorbell to meet others to walk dogs with, borrow cooking ingredients from and more.

"If you need sugar on a Sunday afternoon and you reach out on that app, I meet you down in the lobby and give you sugar and you go make cookies," Carter said.

Benjamin Pleat, CEO and founder of Doorbell, said the company is trying to create a community in the Grid District - both digitally and in-person through its app and pop-up events, respectively.



"That comes back to three main things - one is living, a place

you call home; two is working; three is playing," he said.

Doorbell also works with 3,300 apartment units in downtown Boston.

Pleat said Doorbell's goal is for residents to get to know five to 10 of their neighbors. Residents can also access discounts to local restaurants and coffee shops through the app.

"That really is super integral especially in the downtown context where the Grid District is in the heart of the city," he said. "It's been great, we've seen some unbelievable connections being made with residents, we've seen the community come to be."

Worcester has been in the midst of a renaissance of development, dining and culture in the past several years and the downtown has been the epicenter.

Raman Singh, 25, lives in the Grid District's Park Plaza building and attends nearly every Doorbell event at The Grid. He goes to school at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences and moved to Worcester in August.

"When I got here, it was a good place to meet people through the events," Singh said.



FoodSquire and Doorbell also partner on some events at The Grid. During a recent "Starch Madness" event, the companies brought in four different starches from the Boynton - French fries, potato skins, Bavarian pretzels and nachos. Residents had the option to vote for their favorites.



FoodSquire aims to differentiate itself from other delivery services like GrubHub by providing food from restaurants that have never delivered before, like Worcester's Wonder Bar Restaurant or Kenmore Diner.

"The whole idea is simple, don't leave the house if you have to and our drivers will come into the lobby and someone will come downstairs," said Rob Simon, director of business development at FoodSquire. "Some of the (residents) either don't drive or walk to work, so we don't want you walking out. If you want the Boynton on Highland Street, we're going to bring it to you, that's the whole angle."



Delivery through the app costs \$5 and customers earn reward points for every purchase, which they can cash in for discounts or merchandise like T-shirts.

FoodSquire also plans to expand its service to deliver pet food in the coming month, and eventually groceries.

"Delivery has been around seven to 10 years in the Boston area and we're just trying to capture a piece of Worcester because we know it's a home run here," Simon said.

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