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Housing joins 12 Crane businesses

Mixed use includes apartments

By Brian Lee TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

SOUTHBRIDGE— The Hop Vine Café opened in October and Honest Town Brewery in March.

The cherry on top of the mixed-use 12 Crane St. project, which includes four third-floor apartments, came yesterday, as local and state officials celebrated the opening.

Three of the units are categorized as affordable and are designated for people with handicaps.

The project two years ago landed a \$465,685 Housing Development Support Program grant administered through the state Department of Housing and Community Development.

The affordable units are 1,200 to 1,300 square feet and rent for \$845 a month. The fourth unit is 1,700 square feet for \$1,500 a month. Each unit has a clear view of the Quinebaug River.

The adaptive reuse project converted a rundown warehouse that had been a dog food plant, said former state Rep. Mark J. Carron, who emceed yesterday's ceremony.

The facility has a restaurant, retail-office space and work space for artists.

Mr. Carron advocated the project when he was representing the 6th Worcester District. The Southbridge Democrat rents space in the building for Inquiry Systems Co., his direct mail services business, and he recently purchased a bakery in the building.

The building was purchased by Roderick P. Murphy and developer J. Gabriel McCarthy. The 12 Crane Street Corp. operates the restaurant and a bar, The Dark Horse Tavern, as well as the brewery and Cannery Hall for concerts, auctions and functions.

The corporation is separate from the building's ownership.

Cassandra M. Acly, town economic development director, said she couldn't "express how much this project means to the town," in part because of its proximity to the Quinebaug Rail Trail, where a bicycle-walking path is being developed.

State Sen. Richard T. Moore, D-Uxbridge, said the once-derelict building was very much like a crane in that it has uplifted the community and, hopefully, the commonwealth.

“When we develop the Quinebaug Rail Trail along the back and connect to other parts of the area,” such as Dudley and Webster, “that itself will also bring people into this neighborhood for very positive activities,” the senator said.

John Curran of the DHCD said, “At one time this building was going to be taken down, and Gabriel (McCarthy) took a look at the back wall, which the building inspector had cited, and said, ‘I can fix that.’ And fix it indeed he did.”

Mr. Curran credited the developer’s vision, drive and good sense to Alice Boyd, of Bailey Boyd Associates, the project consultant.

The state official also noted his common heritage with Mr. McCarthy: “There’s an axiom in life: Whenever two Irishmen meet, the chances of a pub being within 100 feet” are good.

Margaret Morrissey, Mr. McCarthy’s wife and a co-owner, said the key to the project was local officials helping move it through various obstacles.

The apartments are available for occupancy and anyone interested in becoming a tenant should contact Mr. Murphy or Mr. McCarthy or stop by, Ms. Morrissey said.

“It’s not just to move into an apartment in a building,” she said. “They need to buy into the whole thing ... Part of it is a commitment to be a good neighbor.”