

Gateway Greetings

Two Little Italy landmarks, long considered eyesores, are getting rehabbed to make room for town homes

By Christine Serio

Little Italy, a historically ethnic neighborhood steeped in tradition, has been home to many landmark businesses—some of which continue to thrive and others that mark where a popular neighborhood place used to be. Now, two of those spots are on their way to a makeover.

DiNardo's Crab House at the top of Lincoln Street, once a bustling restaurant that attracted people from throughout the area, has been vacant for more than seven years. The empty lot across the street, formerly home to Zappaterini Bakery, has also been a Little Italy eyesore. The properties will soon have a new look and new tenants as they become the Villas of Little Italy.

The project at Fifth and Lincoln streets is a result of collaboration by the Wilmington Housing Partnership (WHP), the City of Wilmington, Little Italy Neighborhood Association (LINA), councilman Paul Ignudo, and private builders Casale Construction, LLC.

Leaders of LINA always hoped DiNardo's would re-open, but when it was evident that wasn't going to happen they continued to work with the city and Ignudo to address concerns about the property.

"Vacant property is the playground for the devil and the whole property fell into disrepair, so we worked with the city's license and inspection department so it wasn't such an eyesore," says LINA president Luigi Vitrone. "I was introduced to the Rob Bucini, WHP chairman of the board, and the partnership became involved in developing a plan and finding a builder."

Jerry Cain, executive director of the Housing Authority, decided the nonprofit should be involved with the project. WHP purchased the two properties for \$335,000, conducted environmental testing of the sites, removed asbestos from the former restaurant, and developed a concept for the new homes. Since WHP is designed to build affordable housing, the organization couldn't build the project and stay true to its mission.

"The WHP builds affordable housing in the city that usually falls no higher than the \$150,000, \$160,000,

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DevelopmentNotes

Justison Landing Sculpture Design Entries Get Narrowed Down

A new sculpture— the result of a public art competition—will serve as the focal point of a newly designed urban plaza at Justison Landing, the \$500 million Buccini/Polin Group redevelopment project set on the Christina River. Who will be commissioned to create the sculpture? The City of Wilmington, in conjunction with the Riverfront Development Corp., Public Arts Committee, Delaware Dept. of Transportation, and Riverfront Design Team, assembled a selection committee to conduct the competition and to determine who the artist will be. Entries that were submitted (by the March 23 deadline) are now being reviewed by the committee to narrow the scope to three to six qualified artists who will be asked to submit formal proposals. The committee's goal is to identify an artist or team with the skills, experience, resources, and vision to create and install a high quality piece of public art. The available budget for the sculpture, provided by both public and private funds, is \$200,000 not to exceed \$500,000 inclusive of all artist expenses, materials, fees, and installation costs.

Springfield College Moves to New and Expanded Campus in Nemours Building

Springfield College's School of Human Services has moved to a new and expanded campus at 1007 Orange St., on the fifth floor of the Nemours Building. Springfield College became part of the Downtown Education District in September 1995 at its previous location at 501 Shipley St. With campuses across the United States, Springfield College is considered a top educational institution for adult learners. For more information, call 658-5720 or visit www.spfldcol.edu.

Dept. of Health and Social Services Extends Lease

The state's Dept. of Health and Social Services (DHSS) extended its lease with the Buccini/Polin Group for another five years at their Three Mill Road location. The DHSS will continue to occupy more than 7,000 square feet in a lease transaction valued at more than \$800,000. CB Richard Ellis represented the owner in the transaction.

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Above: An illustration of Justison Landing, whose plaza will be adorned with the results of a sculpture contest currently being held.

CityLife

he has two LINA memberships, one for his company and another as an individual. He recognizes the importance of building partnerships in order to revitalize Little Italy.

"In a neighborhood where the city gets involved and revitalization happens, you create a buzz that attracts investors," Casale says. "This is right at the gateway of Little Italy and movement spurs movement. So when it happens on one block it happens on another block."

"The current city administration is a great approach. Mayor Baker has been the most hands-on with his administration in terms of development. They're out here looking at their sites and involved with the concepts. It's great working with the WHP and LINA and has been an extremely positive experience all the way through."

Mayor Baker agrees that partnerships are key to successful projects like the Villas of Little Italy.

"There is a lot of support for this project because everyone knows it's important to revitalize ourselves and not become the biggest blight in the biggest town. This project here working together—not just the city is responsible for this," he says. "Neighborhood associations need to look at ways to market their neighborhoods, talk about why it's good to be here and have businesses. Eventually, people start to pay attention to your neighborhood when you have websites and make improvements. LINA does a great job of that and this project says, 'We think it's grand to live here.'"

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A drawing depicts the Villas of Italy, a set of town homes that will soon inhabit the former locations of DiNardo's Crab House and Zappaterini Bakery. Rendering provided by the City of Wilmington