

Town houses to open at DiNardo's site

Empty building in Wilmington's Little Italy to get renewed life

By ADAM TAYLOR
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WILMINGTON — It's been a long time since people feasted on Maryland blue crabs at DiNardo's Restaurant in Little Italy. Since the popular eatery closed in 1999, the Lincoln Street landmark has been vacant and its parking lot across the street unused.

Now, thanks to some help from the nonprofit Wilmington Housing Partnership, a private developer has nearly completed converting the restaurant into two town houses and will build six more on the parking lot this summer. The development is called the Villas of Little Italy.

"A deteriorating building and an empty parking lot with a chain gate have sat just beyond the entrance arch into Little Italy for too long," said partnership Executive Director Jerry Kane. "The restaurant was in really bad shape. We were working on the back of it and the whole back fell down, so we had to rebuild it."

The partnership bought the property last year for \$335,000 and spent another \$25,000 in legal, environmental and design costs, Kane said. They quickly sold it to Casale Construction LLC for \$400,000. Casale paid some cash up front and will pay the balance once the town homes on the parking lot are sold.

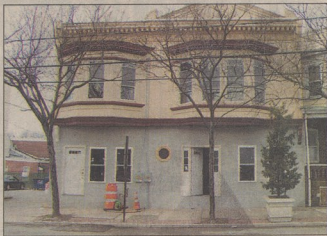
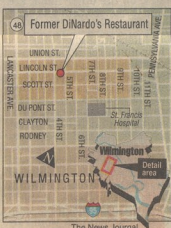
The town homes at the restaurant have been sold for about \$200,000 each, city Communications Director John Rago said. The town homes on the parking lot, which was once the site of the Zappterrini Bakery, could sell for up to \$250,000, he said.

The town houses will have three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a powder room and central air conditioning. They will have brick facades and off-street parking.

Luigi Vitrone, owner of Pastabilities restaurant and president of the Little Italy Neighborhood Association, said the DiNardo's building was too dilapidated and contained too much asbestos for a restaurateur to make a go of it.

"We'll have eight new families there paying taxes and, hopefully, volunteering their time and effort to the community," he said. "The empty building and parking lot were playgrounds for the devil."

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City of Wilmington photos

TOP: DiNardo's Restaurant before the renovations.
BOTTOM: Two town houses will open this summer in the former Lincoln Street eatery.