

News

## Isles turning Bromley 'eyesore' into jewel of the neighborhood

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HAMILTON — The big “eyesore” at the corner of North Johnston Avenue and Nottingham Way will soon blossom into a high-end, environmentally friendly building that transforms the township’s Bromley section into an artists’ paradise.

That’s because Isles Inc., a community development nonprofit, has acquired the dilapidated building and will redevelop it into a “sustainable urban village” — a fusion of artist studios, mixed-income housing and retail space.

The redevelopment project is called “Mill One” and the building will serve as the future headquarters of Isles, which currently has several offices in Trenton.

“We thought we could take this building and turn it into what, in effect, is going to be a mixed-use village that will allow us to have our own space there and allow us to bring in other organizations at an affordable price,” Isles co-founder and president Marty Johnson told The Trentonian yesterday.

“It would allow us to create a training center and school and important connections to the arts community, as well as the community of people who want to see small businesses develop,” Johnson said.

“I’m so excited; it’s going to be wonderful,” said Joyce Vaughn, 61, who worked in the Johnston Avenue building when it was a family-owned golf bag manufacturer known as Atlantic Products. “I was the last employed there.”

Vaughn, a lifelong Hamiltonian, went on to work for the township, where she’s currently employed as a secretary in the Division of Engineering. She said the building slowly degenerated into an “eyesore” once the business closed up shop in the face of stiff competition overseas.

“It was just sad to see the broken windows and the slow deterioration of it,” Vaughn told The Trentonian. “I remember when it was full of character and love. To see life back in that building, I’m sure it will be good for the neighborhood.”

The 240,000-square-foot building was erected in 1895 as a shirt mill but had been vacant for more than 20 years until Isles and Ewing-based Modern Recycled Spaces acquired it in 2006.

Isles owns half of the building, according to Johnson, who said the renovation is scheduled to begin by the end of this year. Isles is hoping to move into the redeveloped building by spring 2011, Johnson said, adding that it will be renovated to the “platinum certification” environmental standard.

Johnson co-founded Isles in 1981, and the organization has experienced significant growth over the years as it expanded to serve Mercer County in many facets ranging from environmental improvement to youth development.

Johnson said the “expansion of our operation and the need to consolidate” is what prompted Isles to shop for a new headquarters. Isles chose the Mill One site because it was a large historical building in a strategic location.

The first phase of the project will cost about \$15 million, according to Johnson, who said the organization has a “complex” financing plan to raise money and lobby for an array of tax credits.

Congressman Chris Smith of Hamilton has secured \$500,000 in funding for the Mill One project in an appropriations bill that is expected to be signed into law by President Barack Obama.

That funding will help pay for the 8,000 square feet of solar and thermal panels that will be mounted on the building.

Michael Angarone, director of the township's department of technology and economic development, said the township is "seriously looking at" transforming Bromley into an arts and cultural district that stretches from the Mill One building to the Grounds for Sculpture park.

Isles said the local community is supportive of the Mill One project.

"It will bring jobs to the neighborhood. It will be nice," said Robert Blakely, 46, who lives on North Johnston Avenue near the Mill One building. "Now they are doing something, and that's good. Anything is better than nothing. It's an eyesore. It's just been sitting there."

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