

## Apartment complex on track

### \$12M project will transform former Clark Biscuit factory

By Scott Stafford  
Berkshire Eagle Staff

NORTH ADAMS — The \$12 million project to convert the former Clark Biscuit Co. building on Ashland Street into affordable apartment units is on budget and on schedule for completion in July, according to Colin P. O’Keeffe and Richard C. Relich, partners in Needham-based Arch Street Development.

This project transforms what was once 68,000 square feet of blighted, dilapidated brick behemoth into a modern testament to reuse and renewal.

Dozens of heavily clothed construction workers have been busy assembling the interior throughout the winter months, at times in sub-zero temperatures.

Work is progressing smoothly, the developers said. All the floors are at least partially framed, with new vertical space cut out of the concrete for the main staircase and elevator. Two of the antique brick ovens were removed, but the other two have been saved for reuse as unique living space. They will serve as a room in two, one-bedroom apartments.

In all, there are 10 one-bedroom apartments and 33 two-bedrooms. Flooring will consist of prefinished wood in the kitchens and living areas, carpeting in the bedrooms and public areas, and vinyl composite tile in the bathrooms.

Already potential tenants have been calling Berkshire Housing Services — (413) 499-1630, the company that will be renting and managing the apartments — to get on the waiting list.

“We’re getting calls from all kinds of people,” O’Keeffe said. “Retirees, families, and some folks getting pushed out of South County wanting something more affordable.”

Fortunately, Relich said, financing for the project was already in place, so the recent credit market collapse had no effect on the project.

“Our timing was good,” he said.

A number of features of the project emphasize energy conservation. All the appliances, furnaces and windows are energy efficient, and the roof drainage system employs a unique process for retaining the water for use in watering the property’s landscaped areas.

The public areas of the building will feature details from the original factory, highlighted by

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track lighting and pendant lights, with much of the wall space covered with work by local artists.

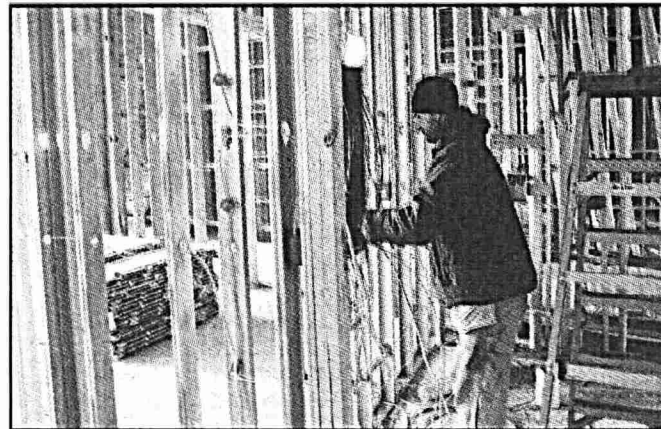
When fully occupied, the project can house more than 100 people.

The old smokestack will be restored and the words “Clark Biscuit” repainted on the tower in the original font, to serve as a unique landmark in the neighborhood.

The project consists of two buildings: The older, brick and wood frame, three-story structure was built at the end of the 1800s. The other part of the factory, with four stories, was built in the 1920s using concrete for the walls, floors and support beams. It offers giant windows, and high ceilings with concrete support beams.

About 12,000 square feet of unusable space was demolished, and one section of the building — attached to the old smokestack — will be renovated for administrative office space and a common gathering area.

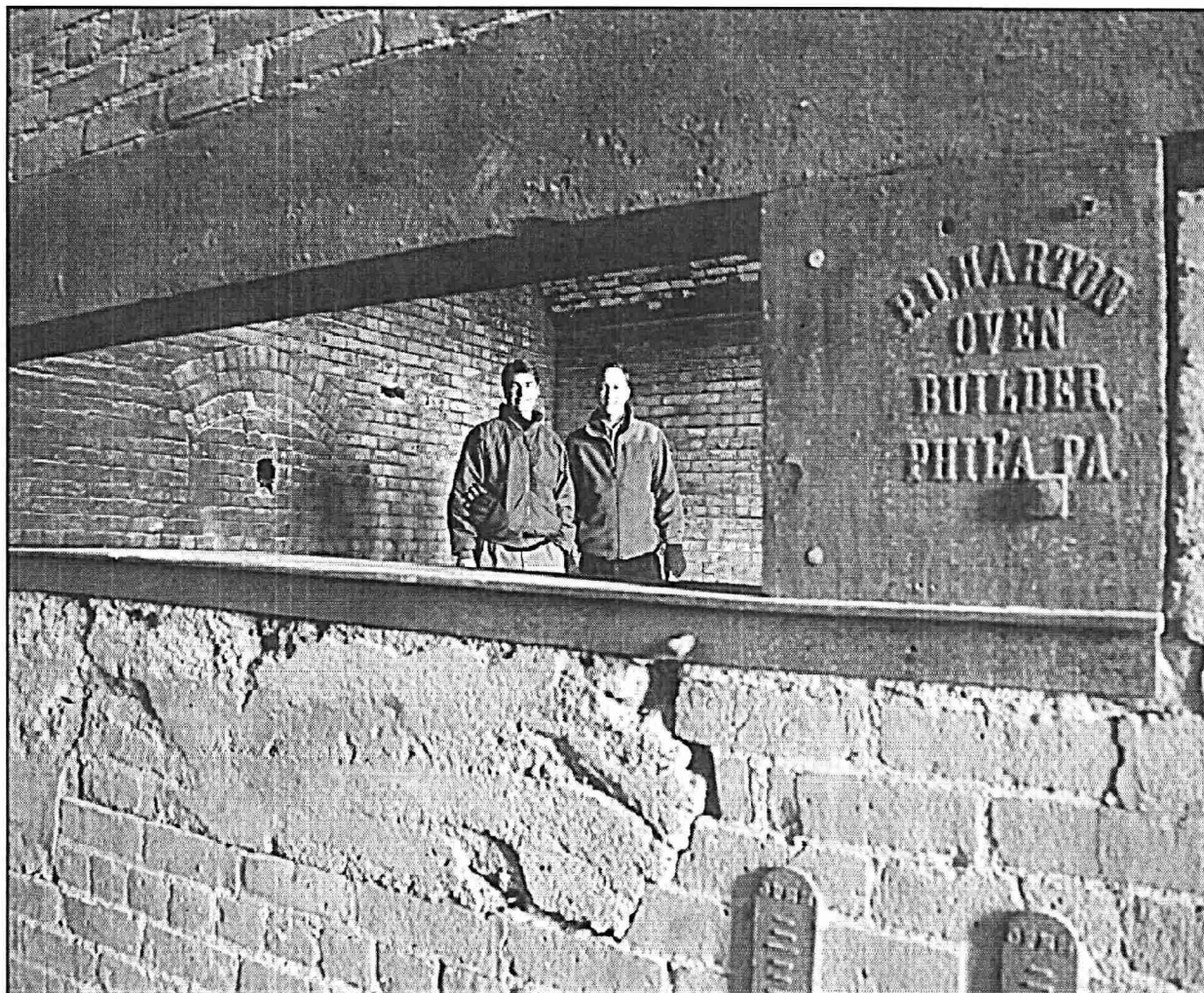
The old biscuit factory once served as a textile mill, a restaurant, a french-fry machine manufacturer, and as the home base of the Interfaith Church of the Divine Cosmogony. The church owned the building when the city took possession in lieu of \$25,000 in unpaid property taxes.



Scott Stafford / Berkshire Eagle Staff

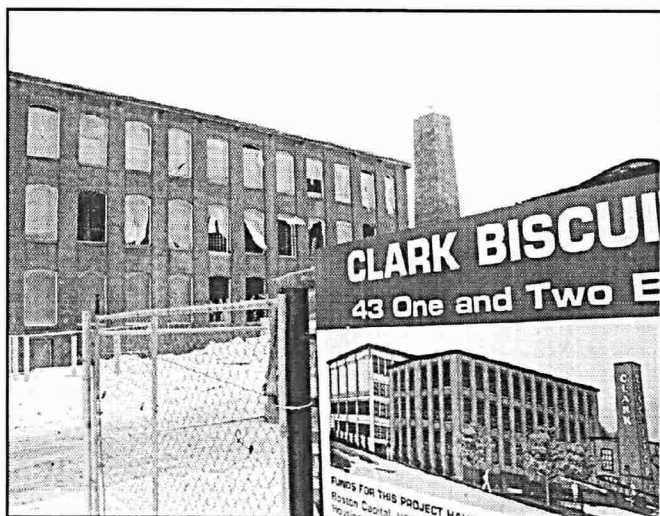
Skip Alibozek of Sommer Electric works on wiring Tuesday for apartments inside the old Clark Biscuit factory in North Adams.





Photos by Scott Stafford / Berkshire Eagle Staff

Developers Rich Relich and Colin P. O'Keeffe are shown inside one of the old ovens at Clark Biscuit factory that will be converted into living space. The \$12 million project is on target, despite the poor economy and brutal winter conditions.



The architectural rendering for the apartment project is posted outside the old Clark Biscuit factory in North Adams.

Printing imperfections present during scanning