

Peek inside long-vacant Addis department store in Syracuse as redevelopment starts (photos)



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Syracuse, N.Y. — Its racks of clothing and display cases full of cosmetics have been gone for nearly a quarter of a century. The mushy remains of fallen ceiling tiles cover its terrazzo floors.

After rotting vacant and neglected for most of the last 24 years, the former Addis Co. department store in downtown Syracuse is about to see new life as a mix of apartments and retail and office space.

Work recently started on \$5.6 million project to bring the badly deteriorated building, located next to the Galleries of Syracuse, back from the brink.

Workers are removing asbestos and replacing the roof on the five-story, 37,500-square-foot building at 449-453 S. Salina St.

Tim Lynn, a Syracuse attorney and a member of the project's development team, said reconstruction of the interior, including restoration of its terrazzo floors, will begin in March and is expected to be completed by the end of 2017.

Plans are to put retail on the first floor, office space on the second floor and a total of 18 apartments on the top three floors (six units on each). However, the top four floors could be turned into office space if an office tenant needing that much space can be found, Lynn said. No office or retail tenant has been signed up yet, he said.

The project coincides with several other redevelopment projects in the works in the 400 block of South Salina Street. Plans have been announced to redevelop the **Empire Building** into a mix of apartments and offices, the vacant **Symphony Tower** next to the Marriott Syracuse Downtown (formerly the Hotel Syracuse) into an extended-stay Hyatt House hotel and the former **Sibley's Department Store** into office and retail space and the new home of the Redhouse Arts Center.

"When we're all done, it's going to be a great spot here on the 400 block," said Lynn.

Designed by Syracuse architect Fred B. O'Connor for the W.I. Addis Co., the upscale department store opened on Feb. 6, 1929, with three times the space of the Addis store it replaced just a block away.

The Art Deco-style building originally had four floors. A fifth floor and air conditioning — it was reportedly the first completely air conditioned store in Syracuse — were added in 1935. By 1939, the store employed 240 people and had a reputation for paying at the top of the retail wage scale, resulting in very low employee turnover.

The building is within the city's **South Salina Street Downtown Historic District** and is considered a rare and excellent example of an Art Deco facade in downtown Syracuse.

A granite base course runs below the store's front display windows. Sheet copper pressed in a fanlight design grace the arches above the windows. A stylized wreath banding with corner rosettes surround the building's central entranceway. Fluted pilasters separate the upper story bay windows.

After 63 years as one of downtown Syracuse's top retail destinations, the store closed in 1992, three years after Addis merged with the Dey Brothers Department Store.

The building briefly housed an antique store in the mid-1990s, but the years have not been kind to the former department store. Its Art Deco exterior hasn't changed much, but shoppers who once strolled its sales floors would have trouble recognizing the interior.

The roof has been leaking for years, causing major interior damage. Water from the holes in the roof have pushed down nearly every ceiling panel, turning them into a white paste that now covers nearly every square inch of flooring. A previous owner rolled an elevator motor down its stairs, wrecking their terrazzo steps.

A few reminders of the building's retail past remain, though — empty shelving on the walls, a few empty merchandise display cases and a sign advertising a sale on picture frames.

Lynn and his partners in Addis Building LLC — Stephen Case, Joseph Gehm, Luke Esposito and BBL Construction Services — bought the building for \$157,500 in 2014 from the Greater Syracuse Land Bank, which acquired the property after the city seized it for back taxes. They were the only group to submit a bid for the property, likely because of its condition.

The development group expects to obtain federal and state historic tax credits to assist with financing the project. It also has applied to the Syracuse Industrial Development Agency for a mortgage tax exemption valued at \$32,500 and an exemption, valued at \$222,890, from sales taxes on construction materials.

This is Lynn's third recent redevelopment project. He and various partners turned the vacant **C.G. Meaker Food Co. warehouse** at 538 Erie Blvd. W. into office space and 33 apartments, and are planning to transform the former **Oak Knitting Co. building** at 102 W. Division St. into office space and 38 apartments.

Lynn said he visited the Addis store many times with his mother when he was a child and is eager to see the building come back to life.

"It wasn't a simple thing to undertake," he said. "Once we have a roof on the place, then things can get going."

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