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## Perhaps the skinniest building in Syracuse is on the market

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By **Dick Case, Post-Standard columnist**



Dennis Nett/The Post-Standard

Exterior of 539 N. Salina St. a former pasta store.

"Welcome to the place you called the 'skinny building.'"

That's realtor Martin McDermott, senior vice president of JF Real Estate, talking. He's about to tour two visitors, me and photographer Dennis Nett, through 537-539 N. Salina St. This landmark of the city's North Side has to be one of the narrowest bits of real estate in our town.

It measures 13.9 between the outer walls, inside it's only 11 feet wide, in places.

It's been there since between 1890 and 1892.

We've not been inside before.

The building's now for sale, priced at \$69,000.

The place is a wonder, even though it's been vacant since 1996. The last use was as, it's still inscribed over the front door: "Michael's Genuine Fresh Italian Products (home made noodles)".

Michael was Michael DiRienz, who turned out pastas of all kinds in the little shop from 1947, when he bought the building, until his death in about 1995. Then his wife, Angelina, took over. The DiRienzes lived upstairs.



At his mother's death, their son, Anthony, a [retired](#) state police investigator, owned the



building, according to McDermott. Anthony kept it vacant about 16 years. He died in May 2011 and his three children inherited the building. One of his sons, Mark, who lives in New Jersey, talked to me about the home-shop two weeks ago.

"I grew up helping my grandparents in the shop," Mark explained. "We're sad about putting the building up for sale, but we feel it's time for a new owner. My father had a substantial attachment to the place."

Both Anthony and his parents were emigrants from Italy. He served in the Korean War before joining the state police, where he served for 30 years. The heirs had new plumbing and utilities installed in the building, according to Mark DiRienz.

They also cleaned out the place, he said.

One important piece of the building still sits on the first floor, in the old shop. It's a complex pasta maker, from Italy. It's across from another of the shop's furnishings, a table still white from the flour mixed there.

We wind up to the second floor, flashlights in hand. This level has a living room with French doors to an outdoor balcony and a dining room. The living room still has its arched petitions.

We see evidence of how tight construction of the building is. The story still hanging around the North Side, related by neighbor George Angeloro, is that No. 537 was put up "by an old Italian" who placed the building in what had been an alley way to North State Street.

Pam Priest, archivist at Onondaga Historical Association, did some research on the building. She found the first tenant was Ching's, a [Chinese laundry](#). Later, she found a [clairvoyant](#) listed at 537, when it was called the John Hall Block. Marty McDermott was told the building once was a bank. Also, a bait shop.

The bait shop, known as "Vand's Bait," was run by four brothers, Frank, Dominick, Mike and James Vadallas, who ran a fishing tackle and bait shop on the ground floor and lived in the three-bedroom [apartment](#) upstairs, according to their sister, Angie Roffo of Cicero. She said her family lived there in the late '30s and early '40s.

Angie remembered when the CYO building went up next door, so close that the north walls of the agency covered up the apartment windows. She was 10 at the time; she's now 83. Angie said there was a business called Cafe Roma when her brothers bought the building. At the end of World War II, the brothers sold the building and moved up Salina Street, in the same block.

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