



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Robert Seitz makes improvements to a storefront on the Mary & Nellie Flavel Building that will soon feature his new restaurant and seafood market.

## Landmark: Building will feature restaurant, seafood market

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“They screw them down into the earth until they meet a certain resistance, and that resistance is what they determine will hold the building in place,” John Goodenberger, a local historian, said.

While the building was being structurally stabilized, Nick Clark Masonry from Clatskanie went to work over the summer removing and restoring the building’s historic brick veneer and terra-cotta facade.

Broken sections of sidewalk in front of the building were replaced. The Liottas bought a new boiler to power the building’s existing radiators, while keeping the old one as a hulking decorative piece in the basement.

While employing contractors for much of the major work, the Liottas, who previously bought and restored a 1900 Uniontown triplex, have also been doing much of the improvements inside the building’s suites themselves, stockpiling reclaimed wood in the basement to be used throughout the building. “We’re trying to save anything historical that we can,” Liotta said. “We’re not trying to remodel it into any kind of modern thing.”

### Filling up fast

The couple recently put up a sign in the window looking for tenants. After two weeks, they took the sign down after a deluge of interested callers.

“People were just aware,” Michelle Liotta said. “They knew this was being remodeled.”

One of the first to call was Elisabeth Pietila, who recently opened Wild Roots Movement and Massage at 922 Commercial St., with movement classes in the front and massage in a back room. Pietila, an Astoria native, was attracted to the gritty nature of the building, all the way down to the log trucks rumbling past on Commercial Street, she said.

Terra Glaspey has run Terra Stones, a store specializing in rocks, gemstones, jewelry and home decor, for the past 14 years downtown. In 2004, she tried to rent a spot from the building’s previous owner, Mary Louise Flavel, but said she never heard back. Glaspey was looking to downsize her store when she was put in touch with the Liottas.

“I was really excited for this whole end of town, because it’s the first thing people see when they come into downtown,” Glaspey said of the Liottas’ work, adding she hopes to open in the corner suite in February.

Robert and Tiffani Seitz had recently returned to Astoria from Morro Bay, California, where they fished commercially and ran a seafood shop. After seeing the sign and meeting with the Liottas, the couple went to work fixing the storefront for South Bay Wild, a new seafood restaurant and shop they plan to open in the spring on Ninth Street.

“We like the old style,” Robert Seitz said, adding the couple hope to keep the historical nature of the space while blending some nautical flair. “We’re making a little chandelier out of a black cod pot, and then we’ll have different nautical memorabilia.”

The Liottas are fixing up the former Sears storefront at 936 Commercial St. in preparation for a holiday bazaar Dec. 16. Michelle Liotta said the bazaar will become a periodic pop-up event. She hopes to eventually open the space permanently as Reclamation Marketplace, a permanent space for local collectors, artisans and craftspeople in need of a place to sell but not an entire storefront.

### Next steps

The Liottas got lucky with a roof that was mostly in good condition, but still face a lot of work to restore the M&N Building.



John Goodenberger, a local expert in historic buildings, points out earth anchors installed in the basement.



Marcus Liotta looks over work done to improve the foundation.



Fluorescent bulbs removed from the ceiling of one of the units in the newly remodeled Mary & Nellie Flavel Building lay piled in one of the storefronts.

**‘This is about investment in communities, especially downtowns.’**

**Joy Sears**

a restoration specialist with the state

This week, they are reconnecting the building to the city sewer, after replacing broken terra-cotta pipes. They will soon replace the steel windows on the back side of the building with aluminum.

“Painting, we’ll be taking that on as the weather improves,” Marcus Liotta said. “Even though the building structurally is great, and we’ve solved a lot of the big issues, until you paint it ... it’s kind of the last stage.”

There are more than 470 active historical restorations like the Liottas’ throughout the state that are part of the Special Assess-

ment of Historic Property Program. The program allows the Liottas to pay property taxes on the dilapidated building they bought without being penalized for the massive amount of money they are pouring in.

“This is about investment in communities, especially downtowns,” said Joy Sears, a restoration specialist with the state. “We’re basically looking for properties that need significant investments. This can give them a break on those property taxes while they make the investments.”

The Liottas have vastly surpassed the pro-

gram’s requirement to reinvest at least 10 percent of the real market value of the property into the building in the first five years. They can also apply for a future round of tax abatements to improve the building’s Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility, seismic stability and energy efficiency.

The M&N Building’s inclusion on the list of Most Endangered Places provided grant funding for the Liottas to bring in Goodenberger, a historic buildings expert, as a consultant. Goodenberger helped the Liottas apply for the special assessment program, along with the federal historic tax credit program, which is on the chopping block in the new Republican tax overhaul.

Developers and preservationists around the country have sounded alarm bells about the cuts, arguing the lack of a tax credit will prevent many historic structures from being restored. Innovative Housing Inc. would probably use the tax credit to help turn the former Waldorf Hotel near City Hall into workforce housing, Goodenberger said.

“There’s this give and take,” he said of fixing up run-down historic buildings. “You have your choice: Are you going to have an empty building, or are you going to allow a tax break so that these folks can fix it and make an investment in Astoria, and we can have more jobs in Astoria and more businesses in Astoria?”