

# Rejuvenation of Downtown Merchantville Bearing Fruit in Unexpected Places

News Release

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## *“Sky-Breaking” for new Building in Merchantville First new downtown structure in 20 years*

Merchantville, July 19, 1999

A “Sky-Breaking” Ceremony for the construction of a new second floor office building was held today on the roof of Towne Pharmacy at 45 South Centre Street in Merchantville. Towne Pharmacy, a one story building near the intersection of Maple Avenue, will be the site of the first new structure built in downtown Merchantville since the 1970’s.

Surprisingly, the Pharmacy will remain, and the new structure will be built above it with its entrance at the side. Dr. George Sherman, Pharmacist and owner of Towne Pharmacy said, “We didn't have any ground to break for the project, so this appeared to be the next best thing!”

## *Independent Towne Pharmacy bucks trend and grows*

In a business climate where the number of independent Pharmacies is shrinking, and many are being bought by chain pharmacies, Towne Pharmacy has continued to grow. "It's due to the patient focused services we

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offer, like blood pressure, diabetic, and cholesterol screening, that you just won't find at a chain pharmacy," said Dr. Sherman. "We can go the extra mile to build a valuable patient-pharmacist relationship, and as a result the business has continued to grow." On the morning of the ground breaking there was a steady stream of customers in and out of the pharmacy.

### *Unique design raises eyebrows on town boards*

"It has a 1950's feel to it" said Merchantville Mayor Patrick Brennan at the July 13th Planning Board hearing. Several other Board Members expressed surprise at the unusual appearance of the proposed structure. Materials such as galvanized corrugated siding will appear on the facade as well as on a unique overhanging cornice. "I admit, it does depart from what you might expect," said the architect Gregory La Vardera, who will be leasing a portion of the new building. "The color and scale of the addition will harmonize with its neighbors; at the same time an interesting collage of windows and materials will distinguish it."

### *New technology drives project*

Interior Designer Karen Milano who will be sharing the new space with her husband La Vardera stated "the innovation does not stop on the outside". The new offices will utilize the latest in contemporary office furniture design, allowing for flexibility and on-the-fly

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reconfiguration. "Small businesses just can not afford to have rooms that do only one thing - they must be able to rapidly adapt their office to suit the work at hand." This new technology has been driven by corporate downsizing. Office furniture manufacturers have responded by creating flexible systems to accommodate the more dynamic workplace.

Another factor driving the project was the Digital Subscriber Line service which will soon be available in downtown Merchantville. "One of the reasons we sought a location in Merchantville was the DSL" stated La Vardera. "When that comes on line this year all the business in Merchantville will have access to low cost, high speed internet connections." A Bell Atlantic switching station crucial to the new high speed service is located in downtown Merchantville.

### *Project reflects new development pressure in downtown business districts*

This project comes at a time when the last vacant structures in the Merchantville business district are under renovation. Much of the newly available space will be above-street offices. The rejuvenation of the downtown business district has reversed the trend which left much of the office space in town empty. Spaces which have been empty for 10 years are now being renovated to accommodate new tenants. Years ago, many businesses moved out of traditional downtowns following the movement of retail to shopping malls and strip centers. Now as we watch so many

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small downtowns experiencing a vibrant rebirth, it is increasing demand for office space in downtowns as well. Today the growing traffic and congestion in the suburbs often lead small business owners to seek something closer, a short drive or walk from home.

“It’s not only getting to the office and back, it’s nice to be able to walk somewhere at lunchtime - any more there is a mid-day rush hour when everyone jumps in their car to go out,” explains Milano. “Many of the small- and home-based businesses launched due to the layoffs of the last recession are now prospering in the current economic boom. When it is time for them to move out of the home, a downtown location offers them just what they need.”

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(photos follow)



Rendering of 45 South Centre Street Merchantville  
with new second floor addition.



George Sherman, owner of Towne Pharmacy  
in front of his business at 45 S. Centre St.



Ceremony on the roof of 45 S. Centre Street, Merchantville Borough Hall in the background. Pictured l. to r.: Frank North, Merchantville Borough Councilman; Gregory La Vardera Architect; Karen Milano Interior Designer; George Sherman, owner of Towne Pharmacy



Front of Towne Pharmacy at 45 S. Centre Street.

Pictured l. to r.: Edith Silberstein, President Merchantville Historical Society; Karen Milano, Interior Designer