



Shawn Kelley photo

**SOUTHBRIDGE — Paul Bailey, of Southbridge, works on what will be a patio outside of the old Unitarian Church on the corner of Main and Hamilton.**

# From church to business center

## SPACE TO INCLUDE A MERCANTILE, OFFICES

**BY CHRISTOPHER TANGUAY**  
NEWS STAFF WRITER

**SOUTHBRIDGE —** The 368 Main Preservation Realty Trust is well on its way to transforming the former Universalist Church on Main Street into the new Southbridge Mercantile Center.

Jonathan Krack, a member of the 368 Main Preservation Realty Trust, owners of the building, explained that the redevelopment of the building is

part of an ongoing effort to improve Southbridge, which also includes the 12 Crane Street building, also owned by a realty trust of which Krack is a member.

"We're trying to continue the rejuvenation of Southbridge," Krack said. "We've been working on it for the better part of two years now."

Krack and his associates acquired the Main Street

# Work progresses on mercantile, business center

## CENTER

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locale approximately three years ago.

Founded in 1841, the Universalist Church served as a place of worship until 1965 when it was sold by the congregation for commercial use.

Until recently, the building had fallen into such disrepair, Krack said that it was listed as of the 10 most structurally challenged historic buildings in Massachusetts when they bought it.

Aiming for a late January opening of the building, Krack explained that the Mercantile Center will include six office areas, four of which will house independent entrepreneurial businesses. One office will oversee operation of a farmers market/mercantile exchange, and the last office will be available for temporary use by anyone.

For a nominal fee of \$10 per day, a workspace that includes a desk, computer, telephone, conference room and permanent Post Office boxes will be available for traveling business people in need of a temporary location, or the small

business owner who only needs the space on a limited basis.

"It's a great idea," Krack said, "It makes so much sense."

"It's a very 21st century way of urban thinking," Krack added, saying that the co-working space will be able to accommodate the needs of multiple business endeavors.

The mercantile exchange in the building will consist of a farmers market where local growers can sell their products.

Paul Bailey, one of the workers refurbishing the building, said, "It's going to be local farmers like Morse Farm and Paoletti's."

"Each space is going to be \$10 a week," Bailey indicated.

According to Krack, items for sale at the Mercantile will be seasonal, as fresh produce will only be available for a portion of the year; different types of crafters and vendors may occupy the space through the remaining weeks of the year.

Krack explained that the farmers market will also accept WIC vouchers from people receiving public assistance. This will be a huge bonus to the facility, as the closest place for redemption of produce vouchers is in Worcester.

"I think it's kind of a win-win," Krack said.

Yesterday, Bailey and other workers did some exterior work to the facility.

"We're building a patio for people to come out and just sit there, or do their laptop work or whatever," Bailey said.

Just before the front entrance of the building, set in the concrete, are two commemorative coins, minted for the 150th anniversary celebration of the town of Southbridge. One displaying the side of the coin on which a streetscape of Main Street in etched; the depiction includes the façade of the church. The other side, displayed on the accompanying coin features the inscription, "To the victor belong the spoils."

The quotation comes from William Learned Marcy, a Southbridge native after whom Marcy Street is named. Marcy, born in 1786, would go on to become a Senator and Governor on New York.

The two coins set in the walk way came from the American Optical

Company's artifact collection.

"The American Optical museum collection will be housed in that building," Krack said.

Richard Whitney, manager of global standards for the Carl Zeiss Vision company, one of the building's tenants, is in charge of the American Optical collection.

"I have everything in storage and I've added to it significantly," Whitney said.

He went on to explain that old optical instruments and artifacts from the facility such as door-knobs with imprints of the American Optical seal will be on display throughout the Mercantile building. This museum Whitney said, will acts as an expansion of the photo and painting collection in the AO room at the 12 Crane building.

Optimistic of the positive impact the

Southbridge Mercantile Center will have on the town, and looking forward to the official reopening of the building that has been idle for so long, Whitney said, "It's a cornerstone of Southbridge."

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## SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW SOUTHBRIDGE? Answers

1. Hartford, Conn., Springfield, Providence, R.I. and Worcester.
2. 01550
3. Quinsigamond Community College
4. The all either served or still serve on
- the Town Council.
5. Ken Kalinowski
6. 1730
7. Off Route 169

She's at home and smiling again.

