

BAYSHORE
INDEPENDENT

Program revitalizes Keyport

OFF BEAT

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As I was leaving Keyport Borough Hall last week, a building in the downtown business district caught my eye.

I'd passed that way many times but never "seen" the building before. Across the upper facade, little architectural details suddenly proliferate under a new coat of what looked to me like deep turquoise paint. I later learned this was actually teal blue.

Below that, down to the actual storefront, the building had been covered in a pale gray. The final transformation or, rather, restoration of this old building, I was told will be a new storefront system.

The difference is stunning. This little building, which at street level houses Jack's Stationary Store, has no doubt stood inconspicuously for many years, sandwiched in between its downtown neighbors. Now it stands out like a star all because of a fresh coat of paint.

But it's no ordinary coat of paint. This paint is the fruit of Keyport's Neighborhood Preservation Program, which recently entered its fourth year.

The program, funded through the state Department of Community Affairs, was created to revitalize neighborhoods which for different reasons have fallen into various states of decline.

But while the state provides funding and monitors the program, the real impetus for success rests at the local level. Keyport's obvious success, which is becoming more and more visible, is attributable to a special community spirit, harnessed and guided by NPP Coordinator Kathy Shaw.

The program's sign and facade improvements, set in

place last year, offers matching grants of up to \$500 for new signs or awnings and construction loans of up to \$15,000 at the low interest rate of 3 1/2 percent for one to five years. The loans are made available through NPP funding and United Jersey Bank-Mid State, located in the NPP target area. The third element of the program is free technical assistance, is, professional advice from colorists and architects.

So far, nine stores have taken advantage of the facade program and local NPP officials are optimistic others will jump on bandwagon when they see what their

neighbors are doing. All this excitement is catchy.

I've been covering Keyport for about 18 months now and am continually fascinated by the people and their motivations.

Keyport is an old-fashioned town in a lot of ways, unlike its exurban neighbors with their

expansive properties rising from once-fertile farm and woodlands. It's a probably one of the few, where the Lord's Prayer is still recited at the opening of municipal government meetings. And its a town where a remarkable number of residents' roots run deep.

There was a time not so many years when the notion existed that Keyport was not the greatest place to live. To listen those who have lived there all their lives and purposely stood firm, that notion somehow seems ludicrous.

Regardless, Keyport today is a example of what community spirit is all about, of people putting their best foot forward. Aside from the many "old-timers," there are a lot of newcomers to Keyport who are also pitching in. Many of them happened upon Keyport by chance and taken with its charm. They made a good choice.

The Community Advocates is pleased to have assisted in the establishment and administration of Keyport's Sign and Facade Program

