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## Business owners bullish on Stanhope's recovery

BY CORRINALAWSON - Herald Staff Writer

STANHOPE—Local business owners and borough officials predict that the commercial district in Stanhope Center has the ability to rebound and become prosperous again.

Paula Williams, a member of the Stanhope Partnership Committee, said the first step in revitalizing the area has been taken with the restoration of many of the historic homes on west Main Street.

"The Neighborhood Preservation Program helped by providing money to home owners to restore houses that were badly in need of repair," she said. "So the residential areas has been upgraded, and the next step is to attack the commercial area on the east side of the street."

Williams, the owner of the Whistling Swan Inn on west Main Street, admitted that the revitalization would not be easy and that it would take time.

Currently, only three stores and the Stanhope House restaurant are open on east Main Street. The rest of the commercial buildings in the two block area are vacant in various states of disrepair.

Additionally, the sidewalks are crumbling, and non-existent in places and 1-foot-high weeds sprout from the sidewalks in several spots.

However, one of the three store owners in the area said the committee is not on a hopeless quest. Lois Lepkosky, the co-owner of Lou's Pro Shop at 32 Main Street, said her experience in the area has made her optimistic about the future of the town center.

"We've been here three years, and we have done very well," she said. "Of course our shop, which provides used golf equipment is somewhat unique, so that has helped, but I do think the town center is coming back. We see a lot of people coming in."

Williams and Lepkosky both said that one of the more hopeful signs of the revitalization project is the imminent opening of a new deli on Main Street, just across from the Stanhope House.

"I think it is a very good thing for the center," Williams said. "My lodgers walk around the area now, but how much more charming it would be if they had some things to do, some places to shop."

Barbara Byk the co-owner of the new R&B Deli, said last week she doesn't think the opening of the new store is a gamble.

"Most everybody down here can't wait for me to



**NEW DELI - Richard Byk, the co-owner of R&B Deli on Main St. in Stanhope, talks with Steve Brechka, an electrician doing work on the store. Business owners hope the new store will attract more business to the downtown area and promote its revitalization.**

open," she said.

As if to prove the point, at least three potential customers approached the deli during an interview, and turned away disappointed that it was not yet open.

Byk, a Hopatcong resident, said she plans to open by the second week of September. She said she also hopes to rent out the other half of her storefront as a small office or even a gift shop.

"It would be perfect for a gift shop," she said. "People do come down here because of the post office and the Municipal Building, and this would be very close for them."

Still, Byk said the borough also has work to do to help business along.

**The Community Advocates has assisted  
The Neighborhood Preservation Program in creating  
and implementing successful development programs  
to improve the commercial district.**

"I think this town could be really nice if they would just fix it up, it's really not in good shape right now," she said.

Williams said that Byk's concerns about the dilapi-

dated state of the commercial area are being taken into account by the partnership committee. She said the group is waiting to hear on an application filed several months ago for a \$300,000 Small Cities block grant from the state Department of Community Affairs.

Williams said the application was submitted in March, and said the group hopes to receive an answer within the next several months.

Williams said the money will be used to repair the sidewalks and convert them to a brick walkway, which is in keeping with the atmosphere of a historic town center.

Victorian-style lighting would also be added to the street, and the rest of the money would be spent to spruce up the area with planters and other decorations, Williams said.

"We are hoping to convert this into a Chester, or a Clinton, a tourist area that people will go out of their way to come to," she said.

"And I think with a little work that could be accomplished."

Mayor Michael Bender said the municipal government is also trying to help with the revitalization.

He said that bids to fix the curbing on Main Street should be awarded at the next council meeting on Tuesday. After the curbing is finished, Bender said the county is planning to repave Main Street then give Stanhope the ownership of the road. Additionally, Bender said, funds from the Neighborhood Preservation Program will be used to fix up some of the vacant commercial buildings in the hope they will sell or lease easier.

Bender said the borough hopes to solve a parking problem in the area, which could get worse if more businesses are successful, with the purchase of a corner lot for parking at the corner of Kelly Lane and Main Street, which should provide eight to 12 more spaces beginning in September.

"You've got to start somewhere with this type of thing," he said. "We're trying to spruce things up and provide more parking, and I think it will eventually be successful."

Still there was at least one skeptic about the project. K.C. Johnson, the owner of Casey's Canines at 62 Main St. said promises had been made in the past and not kept. "They are always saying something will be done, but I've been here for 12 years, and so far, nothing has changed," she said.



Don Smartt and The Community Advocates