

A landmark preserved ... and restored

Real estate tycoon gets award for saving Scituate Harbor building

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THE PATRIOT LEDGER

SCITUATE

When flames engulfed the Welch Co. building in 1959, many worried that Scituate would lose the Front Street landmark.

The historic building was quickly rebuilt, albeit without the third floor, and it again became a bustling retail anchor in Scituate Harbor.

Four decades later, things again looked grim for the building, which sat empty and neglected on a site that frequently figured in a developer's plans for luxury condominiums.

But the once-dilapidated building has gotten another chance — this time from Boston real estate tycoon Harold Brown, who bought the building last year for \$2.5 million and began a major restoration.

Now, as the project nears completion, Brown has been honored with a 2009 Scituate Heritage Preservation Award. It is the first time one of the annual awards, presented by the Scituate Historical Society and Scituate Chamber of Commerce, has gone to a business.

The award highlights the building's important link to town history, said David Ball, president of the Scituate Historical Society.

"For generations it was the flagship building in the harbor, and it came so close to being lost," Ball said. "It represents everything that's gone on in



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■ The Welch Co. building on Front Street in Scituate Harbor is being restored by real estate magnate Harold Brown, who bought the 130-year-old building last year.

the harbor since the 1870s."

Ball called Brown's plan a "lifesaver" for the building, which was built by Edmund Parker Welch in 1879 to house the Welch Co. and has evolved to fit Scituate's growing and changing needs.

Over the years, the property has been the site of a mill, a lumberyard and various gift shops and restaurants.

Stephen Warner bought the Welch Co. in 1982 as part of a \$15 million harbor redevelopment effort, but the fate of the old building looked precarious after the Welch Co. gift shop moved to a new location next door.

Brown, who worked in Scituate collecting Irish moss during the 1940s, said he used to keep his dinghy tied up behind the Welch Co. and remembers the building well. After working on another condominium project in

Scituate Harbor, he decided to buy the building.

After being finished, the building will house offices, retail shops, a Chinese take-out restaurant and an upscale restaurant called Oro.

"It's been difficult," Brown said of the restoration, which began more than a year ago and is 80 percent complete.

"The building is so old that there was a lot of basic structure and plumbing to be replaced, but we've tried to restore the original aesthetics of the building, right down to the red paint," he said.

Brown, who spends some time in Scituate during the summer, said he hopes the restoration will draw more people to the harbor.

"I think it's a great undiscovered treasure of the South Shore," he said.

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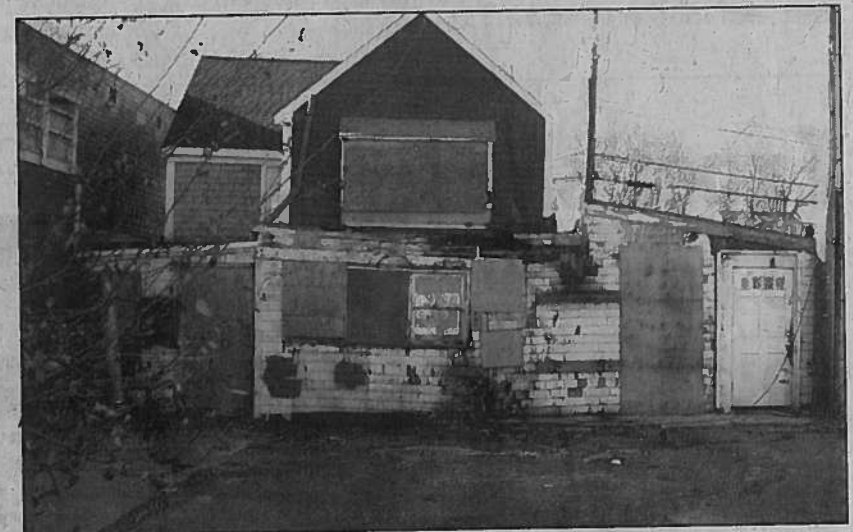


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■ This is how the rear of Welch Co. building looked before the restoration project, now 80 percent completed, was begun.