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Sun Follow-Up

## Brewery project turns a corner

### Crews are finishing stabilization and starting construction at the old American Brewery

By John Fritze

Sun reporter

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With the massive beer tanks removed and the once-exposed rooftops patched and braced, developers of the American Brewery building in East Baltimore are moving forward with a project they hope will spark a revival in the neighborhood.

More than two years after the city selected a team to rehabilitate the 121-year-old brewery, on North Gay Street amid a sea of vacant rowhouses, hammers are swinging on the site and developers estimate that they will reopen the building in spring 2009.

Humanim Inc., a Columbia-based nonprofit social services agency and the lead developer of the project, intends to move a portion of its offices to the brewery when construction is complete. So far, it has raised about 90 percent of the money needed to finish the work.

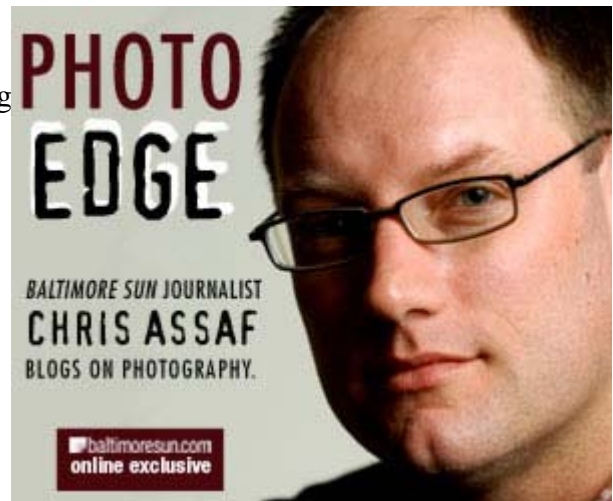
"This is kind of a defining moment for this community," said Henry E. Posko Jr., Humanim's president and CEO.

Despite recent interest in the neighborhood, amplified by a series of articles in The Sun in 2006 about the blocks surrounding the brewery, Posko said the deal was touch-and-go throughout much of last year.

Critical funding for the project did not come through until the last minute.

Now, officials in Mayor Sheila Dixon's administration and leaders in the neighborhood are banking on the effort at the brewery - and an accompanying influx of jobs - to become a symbol of revitalization in one of the city's most troubled neighborhoods.

The immediate neighborhood around the brewery complex, which also includes the 65,000-square-foot bottling building, has a history of violence. A 10-year-old boy and two teenage girls were wounded last



year in a shooting that took place in broad daylight about a block away.

New floors, windows

Gone from the brewery are the unstable facades and ankle-deep piles of pigeon droppings. Many of its interior walls have been removed, and workers have shored up its roofs to avoid collapse. New floors and windows are being installed. Posko said crews are finishing the stabilization of the building and beginning new construction.

Humanim, which provides job training and clinical support for children and adults with developmental and behavioral disabilities, has vowed to bring 250 employees to the neighborhood and to open the 32,000-square-foot building to the community for events and activities.

The Rev. Gregory B. Perkins, who preaches at the nearby St. Paul Community Baptist Church on Federal Street, said that Humanim has agreed to hire from the neighborhood and to provide job training for nearby residents - both of which have helped the project gain support from neighbors.

"So far they have come through," Perkins said. "I think the development that it proposed will be good for the community."

But the project has not been glitch-free. The cost has nearly doubled since Humanim first toured the brewery because the building, which has been vacant since the 1970s, was in significant disrepair. Developers have also spent more to ensure that the building maintains its historic character.

One of the large vats once used to make beer has been worked into the design, and a grain chute in the center of the building will remain as a reminder to the brewery's history.

Baltimore-based Struever Bros., Eccles & Rouse is the general contractor on the project, and Gotham Development of Washington is the project manager.

Humanim raised \$19 million for the project, including \$700,000 in grants from the city that were approved last month by the Board of Estimates. Nearly \$11 million will come from tax credits.

Private donors have given \$4.4 million, including the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, which contributed \$2.75 million to the project, and the Abell Foundation, which gave \$500,000.

'Wonderful building'

Barry I. Schloss, treasurer and a trustee at Weinberg, said the foundation is pleased to be involved with the physical aspects of the project - bringing one of the city's architectural landmarks back to life - but said the driving motivation behind its gift is the work Humanim is doing in the community.

"This is a wonderful building. It's absolutely gorgeous when you drive by and you see what the possibilities are," Schloss said. "We saw an organization that was willing to uproot its employees and move them to East Baltimore."

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