

Lofty goal for an old North Tonawanda industrial site

## In sync with history

By Aaron Besecker - NEWS NIAGARA BUREAU

Updated: 09/30/07 6:02 AM

NORTH TONAWANDA — Anthony Kissling looks at the historic Remington Rand building and sees SoHo, circa 1965.

The old industrial building on Sweeney Street — like many in that Manhattan neighborhood at the time — is ripe for converting into loft space for young businesspeople and artists. And Kissling's expectations for the planned renovation project here are as high as Big Apple skyscrapers.

"This is a great place to start a business," said Kissling, who owns real estate in Buffalo and New York City.

About a year ago, Kissling announced his plans to turn the old industrial site on the Erie Canal into an incubator for start-ups and high-tech firms, with 51 units of living and working loft space.

That can be done, in part thanks to the building's 13-foot ceilings and its 160,000 square feet. But bigger factors, such as road and technological features and the proximity of two international airports, also benefit the project, Kissling said on a visit to the city last week.

"You could be here as well as right down in midtown Manhattan," Kissling said. "You wouldn't be able to tell the difference."

In addition to loft space, the proposed renovations to the former industrial plant include a 10,000-square-foot boat museum run by the Niagara Frontier Chapter of the Antique and Classic Boat Society.

Add to that a restaurant headed by a five-star chef from Manhattan, a health club and a first-floor parking garage, and you have the makings of what's being called the largest renovation project in the city's history.

The \$15 million project has been in the works since 2003, and received an approved set of tax breaks in August from Niagara County. The tax breaks are expected to save the company \$402,000 per year.

Kissling called the Remington Rand renovation an important project that he believes will revitalize the area.

He also sees it as an indication of an economic turnaround in the region.

“You don’t have General Motors moving in, but you have small things. And all that means something,” Kissling said. “This will mean something.”

In mid-October, Kissling plans to announce which architectural firm will complete design work. At this point, work is being done to assess the extent of asbestos contamination onsite.

Each of the 51 units will include two bedrooms, 2½ bathrooms and a 1,200- square-foot living room. The units are expected to range in size from 1,500 to 2,200 square feet.

A common conference area and a rooftop garden also are planned.

### **Work visible to public**

The spaces are targeted toward smallscale, start-up businesses and individuals who can work from home, said Wendy Berner, of the Kissling Interests in Buffalo.

People employed in areas such as Web design, photography or consulting could find the lofts ideal, Berner said. The space would work even for some telemarketing operations, she said.

Plans for the boat museum include an area for restoration of old, wooden boats, said Richard DeGlopper, president of the local chapter of the Antique and Classic Boats Society.

The work would be made visible to the public throughout the process, making the facility a “living-working museum,” De- Glopper said.

The other main section of the museum will be traditional archives, which would help preserve the area’s rich maritime history.

“What better place to be than on the canal?,” DeGlopper said.

In order to attract tenants for the lofts, Kissling said he plans to contact leading business schools using a list compiled by Forbes magazine.

Help will be given to existing tenants, who currently number six and who Kissling plans to relocate within a few miles of the site. He will pay for moving expenses.

### **Historic character**

The former Remington Rand printing plant, at 184 Sweeney St., was built in the 1890s, and closed in the 1970s.

It’s the historic character — including the old radiators that will be kept in the building and painted red — that Kissling hopes will help him land additional tax credits.

Lumber City Development Corp. has been working with Kissling on financial matters as the project has moved forward, said Director James B. Sullivan.

A \$1 million state grant through the Restore New York program, along with other state grants for nearby docks, have been made possible by leveraging local money and helped ensure an overall better deal for the developer, Sullivan said.

Confident of what the project will mean for the city, Sullivan called Kissling's effort a cornerstone for other development.

Lofts and incubator-type buildings have been successful in other metropolitan areas, he said, "and I don't see why it can't be successful in North Tonawanda."

[abesecker@buffnews.com](mailto:abesecker@buffnews.com)