

[<< back to story >>](#)

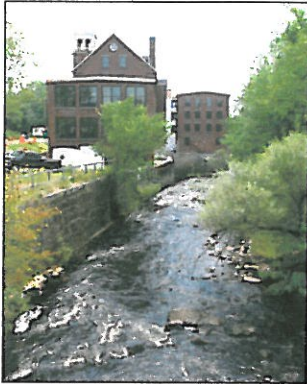
## Portland Press Herald    Maine Sunday Telegram

### Facelift for mill a boost for town

A renaissance for North Berwick, the project provides housing and services, preserves history and highlights creative financing.

By ANN S. KIM, Staff Writer

August 6, 2009



John Patriquin/Staff Photographer  
The Great Works river runs past The Olde Woolen Mill in North Berwick that is being converted into low income housing for the elderly.



John Patriquin/Staff Photographer  
Sheet rocker Shawn Gosselin tapes a window inside a unit at The Olde Woolen Mill in North Berwick that is being converted into low income housing for the elderly.

**NORTH BERWICK** — The old mill once churned out blankets for Union soldiers in the Civil War. As an imposing physical presence and the largest employer in the area, it was the center of town.

But the North Berwick Woolen Mill fell into disrepair. It was largely unused for decades, although one company made trade show display cases there and some scenes from the 1995 film "Jumanji" were shot inside.

Now, the mill is getting a new life as an affordable-housing complex for senior citizens. As the Olde Woolen Mill, it will have 40 apartments for low- to moderate-income residents.

The \$8.9 million project was aided by a new state tax credit that's designed to stimulate investment in historic renovations. It was undertaken by the Caleb Foundation, a Swampscott, Mass.-based organization that operates 2,000 units of affordable housing in New England.

The mill's rehabilitation represents a renaissance for downtown North Berwick. The mill stands at the edge of the village green on the Great Works River. The project will bring walking trails to the public, an improved road and additional parking.

"There certainly is a buzz. People are looking forward greatly to see it open," said Town Manager Dwayne Morin.

The original mill, built in 1832, burned down in 1861. The current brick mill, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1862.

"North Berwick really became the town that it is because the mill moved here. It was a village before that," said Royal Cloyd, president of the North Berwick Historical Society.

Morin said there was fear that parts of the three-story mill could collapse if no renovations were done. In 2006, residents endorsed a tax-increment financing district that would return 50 percent of the property taxes to the Caleb Foundation, with about \$17,500 per year going to the town.

The Caleb Foundation credits the state tax credit for making the project feasible. The program, which began last summer, provides a 25 percent investment tax credit for eligible projects and 30 percent for affordable-housing projects, up to \$5 million. The Bessey School in Scarborough is also among the first beneficiaries.

"It makes many more projects feasible than would otherwise be economically feasible to do," said Greg Paxton, executive director of the nonprofit Maine Preservation.

Paxton said Maine's program is user-friendly and has piqued interest from developers both inside and outside Maine.

At the Olde Woolen Mill, four attached buildings with a total of about 53,000 square feet have been redone inside and out.

The apartments have open kitchen areas, a subdued color palette and green-framed windows. Exposed brick appears in some units, and trusses run along the ceilings of others. Floor plans were determined largely by structural needs, said Bill Hart, the job superintendent for Portland Builders.

"Each room is different. There's no two the same," he said.

The complex's community room opens onto a view of a giant steam engine and flywheel from the mill. The historical society will provide artifacts such as a blanket and a sample book to display nearby.

A part-time service coordinator who will connect residents to services will be part of the staff.

"Our model is to act as a hub of information so residents know who in the community can help them," said Brian Buell, associate director of the Caleb Group, a sister organization to the foundation.

Residents may move in as soon as October, though the contract deadline for Portland Builders is not until the end of November. Residents must be at least 55 years old with annual incomes of \$27,000 to \$39,000, depending on household size.

Many of the town's residents will get their first look during guided tours planned for the Mill Field Festival on Aug. 15-16.

*Staff Writer Ann S. Kim can be contacted at 791-6383 or at:*

**[akim@pressherald.com](mailto:akim@pressherald.com)**

*Copyright © 2009 MaineToday Media, Inc.*

[<< back to story >>](#)