

LOCAL & STATE

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Photos by John Ewing/Staff Photographer

Residents, officials and businesspeople attend an open house for The Mill at Saco Falls, a 66-unit mixed-income residential development in a refurbished mill building in Biddeford, on Monday. There are 33 one-bedroom units, 25 two-bedroom units and eight three-bedroom units.

New GRIST for the MILL

An old factory off Lincoln Street in Biddeford comes back to life as an apartment complex.

By **EMMA BOUTHILLETTE**
Staff Writer

BIDDEFORD — Some prominent brick buildings in downtown Biddeford are now serving a new purpose.

On Monday, a large crowd of residents, developers, city and state officials and business people celebrated the opening of The Mill at Saco Falls, off Lincoln Street.

The portion of Riverdam Mill, formerly known as Laconia Mill 1, was built in 1845. In 2009, Nathan Szanton and Robert Monks, doing business as Maine Workforce Housing LLC, bought the building. Since then, it has been converted into a six-story apartment complex with 66 units.

"It's an amazing reuse of old, dead space," said Jerry Goldstein, admiring a brick



Millie Monks of Cape Elizabeth looks out at the Saco River from an apartment in The Mill at Saco Falls.

archway that was preserved in one of the spacious units on the third floor.

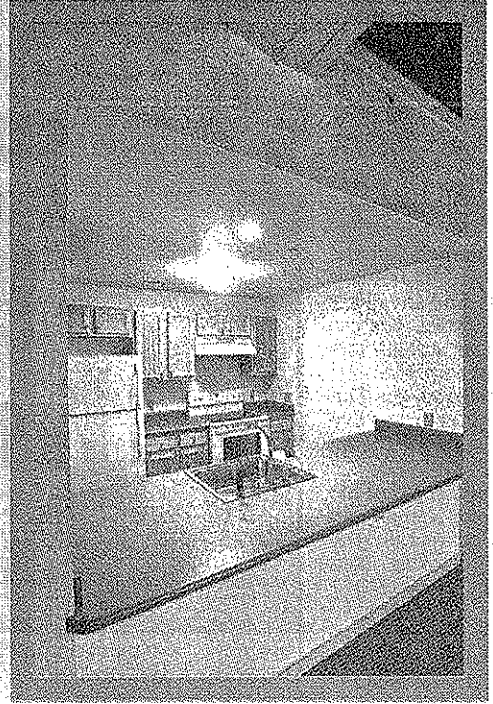
Goldstein, Szanton's father-in-law, said, "anyone can tear a building down," but the architecture of this old building was incorporated into each of the 66 units.

There are 33 one-bedroom units, 25 two-bedroom units

and eight three-bedroom units. Forty-seven units offer views of the Saco River, and all are unique.

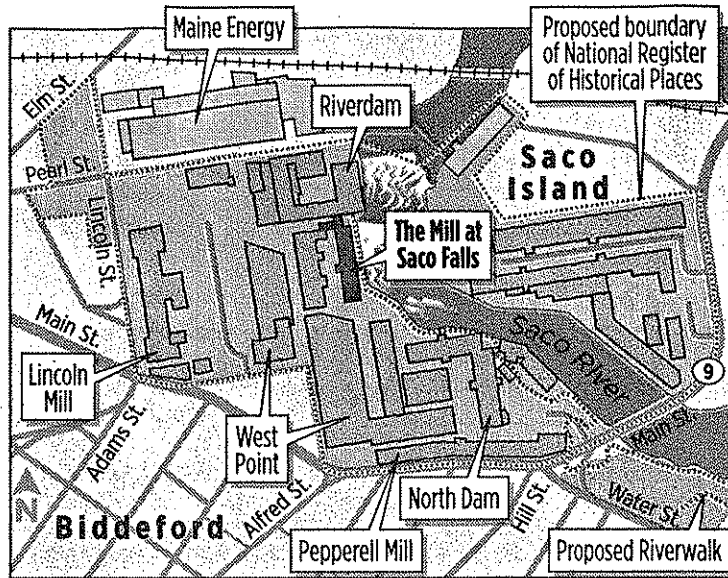
"Nothing is cookie-cutter here," said Biddeford City Manager John Bubier, addressing Monday's crowd.

The \$14.4 million project



A kitchen in one of the complex's one-bedroom apartments.

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Source: City of Biddeford

STAFF GRAPHIC | JEFF WOODBURY

MILL

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includes 40 affordable-housing units, reserved for tenants who earn \$31,900 a year or less for a household of four – which is 50 percent or less of the area’s median income. The remaining units are being rented at market rates.

Szanton said the rent for two-bedroom units is \$925 to \$995 a month, including heat, hot water, wireless Internet and access to amenities such as an on-site fitness center, a theater room and a community room. The affordable-housing rent for two-bedroom units is about \$665.

Szanton said there is no difference between the units listed at market rates and those going for affordable rates.

Fifty-five of the 66 units have been leased, and residents began moving in at the beginning of this month. Still available are five units at market rates and six at affordable housing rates, said Michelle King of Dirigo Management Co., which handles leasing for the property.

With nearly 2 million square feet of mill space in downtown Biddeford, redevelopment projects such as The Mill at Saco Falls are improving the residential quality of the city, Bubier said.

A similar project on lower Main Street, North Dam Mill, owned by Doug Sanford, has 54 residential units and space for more than 50 businesses.

“We want to build housing and jobs in the same complex, not unlike how they were used historically,” Bubier said before Monday’s grand opening, referring to how manufacturing was once done in the mills by workers who lived nearby.

Redevelopment projects such as The Mill at Saco Falls are improving the residential quality of the city, said Biddeford City Manager John Bubier.

Szanton said \$3 million in tax credits was made available for The Mill at Saco Falls, as well as \$600,000 in deferred loans from the Maine State Housing Authority and an additional \$6.2 million in tax credit exchange and assistance as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Gov. John Baldacci, who attended Monday’s ceremony, referred to the impact of the tax credits. “This is a wonderful opportunity to turn around and make this the cornerstone of your community,” he said.

Szanton said the project entailed maintaining the mill’s historic character while incorporating significant green features. For example, solar panels on the roof that heat water required strategic placing to keep them out of sight, because the modern look of the panels would detract from the historic appearance of the building, he said.

This is the first historic renovation project that Szanton has completed. He said he hopes to do more work in Biddeford if the opportunity arises.

“I so much enjoyed giving an old, empty and forlorn building new life. It really gets me up in the morning,” he said.

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