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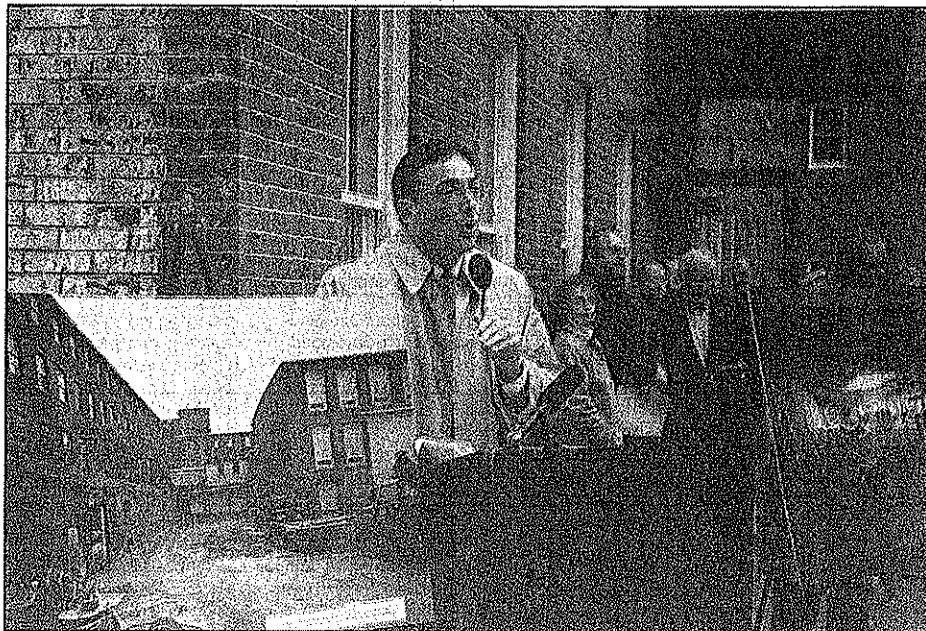
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Developer Nathan Szanton addresses the crowd attending the grand opening Monday of The Mill at Saco Falls. The former textile mill building, built in 1845, has been redeveloped into a 66-unit apartment complex.

DINA MENDROS/  
Journal Tribune

## Reuse of mill celebrated

By DINA MENDROS

Staff Writer

**BIDDEFORD** — More than 150 years ago, in 1845, Laconia Mill 1 was built. It was one of the first buildings to house Biddeford's burgeoning textile industry. Eventually, the city's mill district grew to an estimated 1.5 million square feet, and thousands of people were employed by the mills.

Then the industry moved south and the buildings stood empty, or almost empty, deteriorating for decades.

But Monday, there was a celebration at Laconia Mill 1, which was recently redeveloped into The Mill at Saco Falls, a 66-unit apartment complex.

"These buildings have so much character and personality and so much history."

Nathan Szanton, developer

The renovation not only provides housing, said Nathan Szanton, one of the developers of the project, but it also "raises the property values of all the mills around it and stimulates the economy."

More than 100 people attended the event, held outside of the newly completed, six-story project. People toured the building, where 55 of the units — or 82

percent — are already leased.

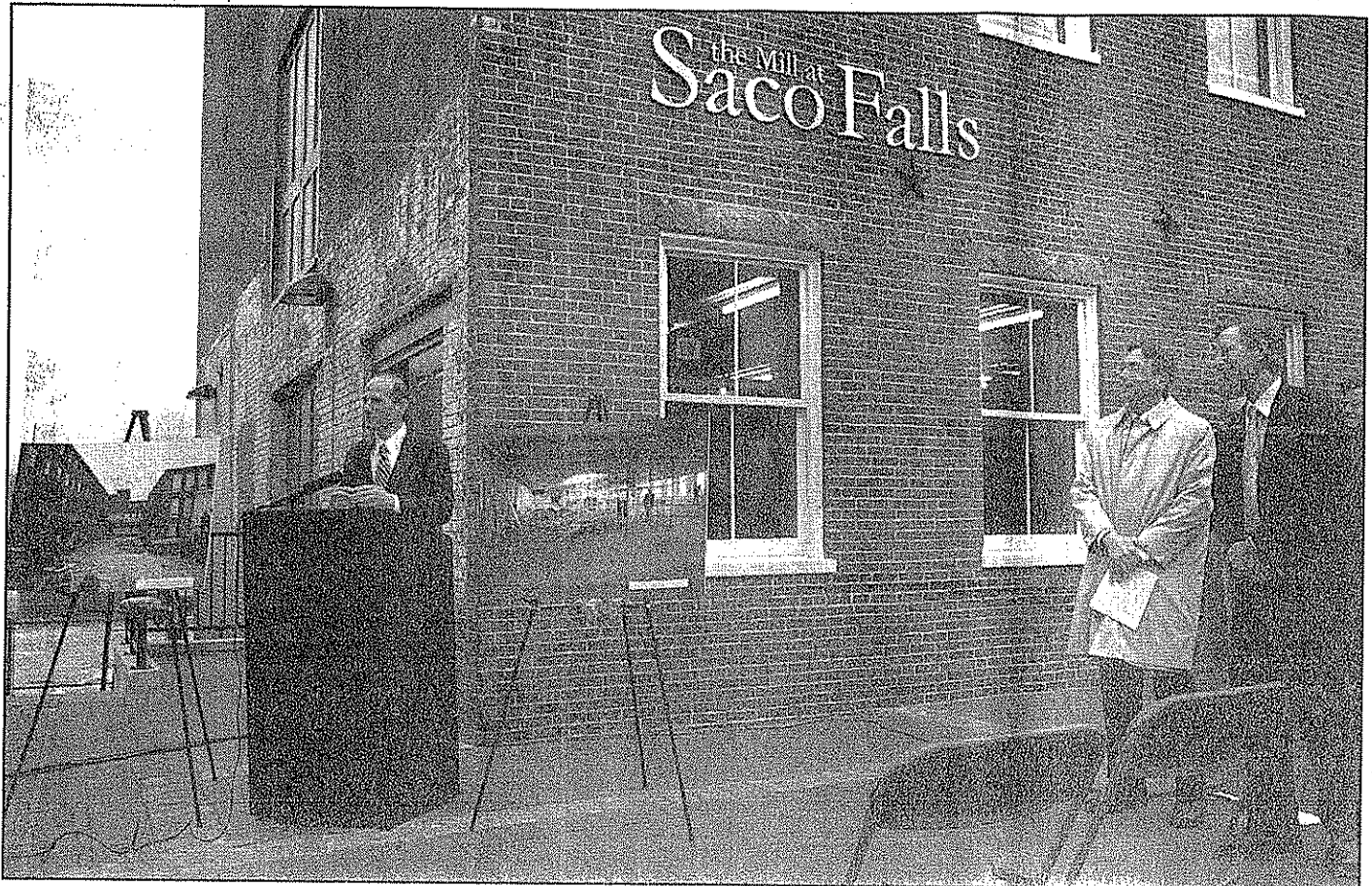
"I think they're spectacular," said Robert C.S. Monks about the apartment units, most of which have a view of the Saco River waterfall. Monks partnered with Szanton to develop the project.

The redevelopment of this building, said Szanton, was the first project in the state completed using the expanded state historic tax credit, LD 262.

"Without LD 262, this couldn't happen," said Szanton.

Although this project is the first, the historic tax credits will be used to redevelop

See Saco Falls  
Page A3



DINA MENDROS/Journal Tribune

Gov. John Baldacci speaks at the grand opening of The Mill at Saco Falls in Biddeford on Monday. Developers Nathan Szanton, center, and Robert C.S. Monks transformed one of the city's former mill buildings into a 66-unit apartment complex.

## Saco Falls

From Page A1

op and revitalize numerous historic buildings throughout Maine, said Gov. John Baldacci, who was a proponent of LD 262 and attended Monday's event.

"This project is an example of exactly what we hoped to develop with the expansion" of the historic tax credit program, said Baldacci.

The program, he said, will be used to improve the economy of the state's downtowns,

prevent sprawl and save Maine's historic mill buildings.

In addition to saving a historic building, said Maine Housing Director Dale McCormick, energy saving measures were used in the project. She said heating and powering the building will use 30 percent less energy than a similar building constructed using traditional components.

Maine State Housing is providing nearly \$7 million to the project through deferred loans and tax credit programs. As a condition of that, 40 of the units

must be leased to those whose incomes are 50 percent of the area median income or below.

McCormick noted that 60 full-time equivalent jobs were also created with the construction of the building.

"This is just a continuation of the revitalization of the twin cities," said state Sen. Barry Hobbins, D-Saco.

Just over the river, renovation of some of Saco's mill buildings has taken place and more is planned.

Szanton said his next project will be to build a similar apart-

ment complex in one of the buildings at the Bates Mill in Lewiston.

However, both he and Monks said they would like to do more projects in the Biddeford Mill District.

"These buildings have so much character and personality and so much history," said Szanton. It brings me joy "to be able to give them a new birth of life."

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