



# Resurrection: Perry's old knitting mill finds its future with supportive housing project

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Matt Surtel/Daily News

The old Perry knitting mill once employed a thriving immigrant population 100 years ago. The last remaining building is now preserved, converted into affordable housing for area residents.

PERRY — There was a time when people thought the old Perry Knitting Mill was beyond saving.

The old building at Elm and Water streets was the last surviving structure of a complex which had embodied the early 20th century immigrant experience — notably providing employment for the large numbers of Poles and Italians who settled in the surrounding neighborhoods.

After years of sitting vacant and essentially abandoned, the building has now been resurrected, while meeting a pressing need.

"There have been several times during this process, most recently during my sneak preview a few weeks ago, when I was moved almost to tears by the enormity of this investment in this place, by the smartness of it, the quality of it, and the need for it," said Mayor Rick Hauser during the location's dedication ceremony this past Thursday. "Not just filling a need but rising to the additional challenge of saving a landmark and knitting together a neighborhood. So many families' lives were touched by the knitting mills and I know they are heartened to see that piece of history secured, celebrated and put to good use for the next 100 years."

The Perry Knitting Company was established in 1882 and grew into a complex which eventually employed about 1,000 people. It drew largely from the immigrant pool arriving at Ellis Island and making their way into the nation's interior.

The complex was a bedrock in that sense, influencing the surrounding neighborhoods — locations such as the former Dom Polski club a short distance away on Water Street which only closed about five years ago, or the sizable dam that once helped power the mills and still blocks the Silver Lake Outlet.

The knitting operation shut down in the late 1960s and most of the complex's buildings disappeared, leaving a single building standing empty for decades and its future long in doubt.

But all that changed about three years ago when DePaul Community Services received state funding for to provide affordable housing within the region.

Work began last autumn on a \$10 million conversion and renovation project which lasted until completion a few weeks ago.

The old mill has been converted into 48 modern apartments, including for individuals who are eligible for on-site supportive services. They include 40 one-bedroom units, three studio units and five two-bedroom units.

They're all served by an elevator, with at least half of them featuring the trademark low countertops and roll-in showers enhancing handicap accessibility.

The project even gained Kudos from Gov. Andrew Cuomo in a news release.

"The Knitting Mills Apartments furthers our commitment to Finger Lakes Forward by providing affordable housing and job training opportunities," Governor Cuomo said. "These apartments will create safe and stable homes for individuals and families who need them most."

During the dedication ceremony, Hauser, representing the village, thanked a wide variety of people and organizations who helped make the project a reality, while simultaneously respecting the building and its history.

He described the Knitting Mill Apartments, as they're now known, as an investment and new chapter in the village's narrative.

"I've heard from many neighbors as well, those cautious about the scale of the work, those who were not excited by the year of disruption caused by construction," he said at the dedication. "Now, at its conclusion, they see life breathed into this gap in their street. Investment at this scale — let's be honest — Perry does not see often enough. You placed a bet on Perry. It's a good one and it will pay dividends to the citizens of Perry, N.Y."

"On behalf of the Board of Supervisors, any time an individual, agency or the State makes an investment in Wyoming County, it always is welcome," said Chairman Douglas Berwanger of the Wyoming County Board of Supervisors. "This will raise the bar of the standard of living for the residents and that is a good thing."

So the knitting mill, once thought all but lost will survive, serving a vital new purpose in the meantime. For more information, check [www.depaul.org](http://www.depaul.org).

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