

Wall Street Inn nears reopening



ABOVE: Abe Novin, owner of the Wall Street Inn in downtown Watsonville, stands on the balcony that overlooks the main lobby of the 1911 building Friday. BELOW: Restoration of the Wall Street Inn, at West Beach and Rodriguez streets, is nearing completion after a five-alarm fire swept through the historical building in 2005.

Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Owner has restored historic building to original grandeur

By JON CHOWN

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Nearly 100 years after it was first opened, the historic Wall Street Inn at the corner of Rodriguez and West Beach streets is almost ready to reopen with much of its original splendor restored.

The building, originally named the Appleton Hotel and designed in 1911 by architect William Weeks, was nearly destroyed in a fire on Jan. 5, 2005. The five-alarm blaze was the largest in city history. It destroyed the roof, charred the upper floors and left 47 residents homeless. Owner Abe Novin had purchased the building for its "historical feel" just three months before.

"It's an icon," Novin said while giving a tour of the building on Friday. "It was sad to see how much damage the fire did, but it's in better shape now than it was."

A tiled entrance with marble moldings along the wall leads through mahogany doors and into a spacious lobby with



a marble fireplace. A mezzanine looks out over the space. Even the original foyer, where guests once checked in, is still intact. Novin has polished the marble moldings to their orig-

inal sheen and repainted the tops of the intricately carved columns gold so they stand out again. A marble staircase leads to the floors above, filled with residential apartments ready

for people to move in.

Novin said he has many apartment rental applications and has also filled two spaces

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ABOVE: Natural light illuminates the Wall Street Inn's fourth-floor hallway, which features a tile floor and accent lighting, and will eventually have art wall hangings. **BELOW:** Wall Street Inn owner Abe Novin shows a mahogany baluster to a staircase that he says was not cheap to replace.

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on the floor level for commercial tenants. A hair salon that has been at the site for nearly 100 years will return and an Herbalife store will fill another spot. But none of that can happen until he has power in the building.

"I am just waiting for PG&E to turn the power on, and then people can start moving in," he said.

Novin hopes to find a coffee shop/bakery to fill a commercial space on the Rodriguez Street side. It seems to be a perfect space for it; tables could be placed in the lobby and even up on the mezzanine. He also has a large space for a full-service restaurant, with outdoor seating available along Rodriguez Street.

"If you go to Europe, you see a lot of buildings like this," Novin said. "People sit at tables along the sidewalk and sip coffee. It's a great location for a nice restaurant."

Another commercial space is available at the corner of the building, where Rodriguez and Beach streets meet.

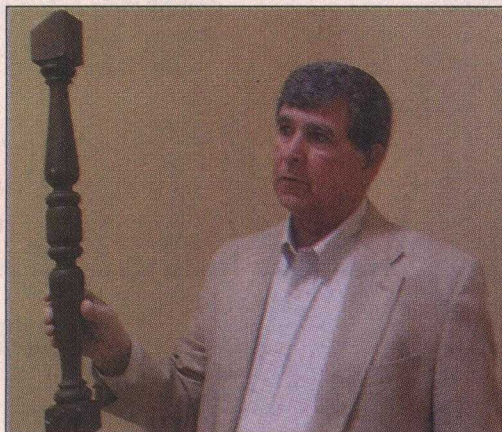
Novin said he had spent many millions of dollars restoring the building, but would not give a specific number. "More than \$5 million?" he was asked.

"Five million? That is nothing," he said. "Much more, but I won't say how much."

To emphasize the point, he picked up a piece of milled wood, a baluster, used to repair the staircase. Just one baluster, he said, cost \$250.

"We spent a lot more than the building is worth, but we didn't know how much it would cost when we started this process," Novin said. "But it's basically a different building now. It's much safer."

On the upper floors, skylights and large windows allow a lot of natural light in, and even without pow-



er, it is still easy to see inside. Each floor is tiled in a different pattern so, Novin said, if somebody with a failing memory gets out of the elevator on the wrong floor, they won't get lost. Other small touches, like the fold-up laundry boards in each room, show Novin's attention to detail.

"I didn't want to take any shortcuts with this building," Novin said. "It has a lot of beauty."

Novin's work has not gone unnoticed. Marvin Byers, who has lived in Watsonville for his entire 72 years and is a member of the Pajaro Valley Historical Association, said he got a peek inside and was very impressed.

"I tell you, it's never looked better," Byers said. "I was so sad to see it when it was burned. What a loss. But I look at it now and it's so nice to see the work going on there. I'm so absolutely delighted. He's really done a marvelous job. I hope he has an open house so we can drool over his work."

Novin just hopes the building is hooked up to power soon so people can move in and he can start collecting some rent.

"It was really a lot of work, a lot had to be rebuilt," Novin said. "But I'm pleased with how it looks now."