

HANDS receives support for Valley

By James Rountree
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Key contributors to the redevelopment of the Valley section of Orange and West Orange were recognized Friday during a ceremony.

Officials with Housing and Neighborhood Development Services, based in Orange, said they have worked with hundreds of stakeholders as well as representatives from the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rutgers University and Seton Hall University to create a plan that will enable the Valley district to reclaim its historical prestige. In turn, they said, that can boost the area's economic potential.

"Our vision is to connect with everyone willing to roll up their sleeves to make the Valley area what it should be: a civic treasure," said Patrick Morrissy, HANDS' executive director.

HANDS has received fiscal commitments for the Valley projects from Valley National Bank, at \$1 million, and \$500,000 each from PSE&G and Prudential. In return for their contribution, the companies are expected to receive an equal amount in tax credits through the state's Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit Program.

Morrissy said the historical importance of the Valley section, which is being redeveloped into an arts district, was a key motivating factor in the decision to invest millions of dollars into reclaiming the area's allure. More than 100 years ago, the Valley was widely consid-

ered to be the hat-making capital of the world as more than 30 factories produced millions of high quality hats every year.

The hat-making business and coinciding arts paved the way for the renovation of the Berg Hat Factory along South Jefferson Street. Morrissy expressed excitement when he unveiled the updated designs for the three-building complex which was opened in 1864.

"The Berg complex will be converted to 29 loft condominiums and the remaining space will become a Hat Factory arts center. It will house 11 artist work studios and a multi-use theater for gallery shows, arts workshops, rehearsal spaces and arts symposiums. Artists of every discipline will be afforded the space to work, create and present their art to the community which has enthusiastically embraced their passion and creativity.

HANDS' officials said the organization also has also made the removal of industrial waste a priority in the redevelopment process.

"This project will ensure the adaptive reuse of district buildings, and make sure hazardous materials emitted by the factories won't contaminate groundwater in the area," said Wayne Meyer, housing director for HANDS. Meyer also expressed his hope that gasoline and oil tanks and holes made by industrial processes of the district will be controlled and efficiently neutralized during the Valley's redevelopment.