

# The New York Times

IN THE REGION/New Jersey

## Reviving a Tired Town

By ANTOINETTE MARTIN

HARRISON

**S**TARTING leasing next month beside the PATH station here: 275 new rental units with an attended lobby, a fitness center, an outdoor pool and volleyball court, a residents' lounge, and garage parking — all within walking distance of a major-league soccer stadium.

Wait a minute. Did we just say Harrison?

Once an industrial center down on its luck, Harrison in Hudson County is now a locus of planned redevelopment on a huge scale. The town hugs the Passaic River as it slices south to form the eastern border of Newark's downtown and curves west to make the northern border of its Ironbound section.

It is true that much of the work in the 200-acre redevelopment area remains on hold, as developers try to sit out a sluggish economic period. But near the PATH station, there is concerted activity. Even David Barry, the president of the Ironstate Development Company, which is building the residential complex (along with a partner, the Pegasus Group), concedes that the imminent opening of what is being called Harrison Station may come as news to many, despite eight years of groundwork.

"If you're a person setting out to look for a cool new apartment that you can commute from in this area," Mr. Barry said, "it's possible you've never heard of Harrison." Which is why "we are launching a major branding effort — not just for Harrison Station, but for the entire area."

Employing the slogan "Connect Here," Harrison Station will be marketed for its exceptional transit access: steps from the PATH and from a new parking garage; 2 to 3 minutes from Newark, 10 minutes from Jersey City, 15 from Hoboken, and less than half an hour from Manhattan or Newark Liberty International Airport. The site is off Interstate 280 and has quick access to the New Jersey Turnpike.

Mr. Barry and Gregory Russo, another principal of Ironstate, spoke of their hopes that the new rentals, partially built over retail



EMILE WAMSTEKER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

**NEW RENTALS** The Harrison Station apartment complex, now under construction, is next to a PATH station and within walking distance of the new Red Bulls soccer stadium.

space, will help establish an identity and sense of place for the overall project — and perhaps encourage other developers to move forward.

Back in 2002, a \$1 billion plan to transform a huge parcel of then-mostly-contaminated property into a bustling mixed-use village called Harrison MetroCentre was announced by the Advance Realty Group, the lead developer, and county and state officials bringing public bond financing and a preapproved package of tax breaks.

Environmental cleaning and infrastructure work began the next year, but proceeded very slowly because of site difficulties. In 2007, the first housing project opened: an 86-unit condominium building called the River Park at Harrison, at the edge of the sprawling redevelopment area, set beside the river. Built by the Roseland Property Company and Millennium Homes, it sold out quickly. But by the time a second building opened the following year, the condominium market was taking a dive. The second building eventually sold out, with the help of a year-free-mortgage offer.

Last year, a 25,000-seat stadium for the New York Red Bulls professional soccer team was

completed across Frank E. Rodgers Boulevard from the PATH station, and a four-story parking deck went up at Harrison Station — available for soccer event parking, but also establishing the first amenity for residents of the apartments about to open.

"Our plan was always to start up with rentals," said Mr. Barry of his company's development, which is set on a 27-acre parcel south of Interstate 280 and west of Frank E. Rodgers Boulevard.

Condos are still in the blueprints for Harrison Station, he said, but only if the market warrants it after a couple more phases of construction are complete. Early next year, Mr. Russo added, construction will start on a 136-unit hotel to be built around and atop the parking garage.

After that, two more rental buildings are on the agenda.

The first group of apartments, available for occupancy after Labor Day, includes studios, one- and two-bedroom units with high ceilings, oversized windows, premium kitchen appliances and in-unit washer/dryers.

According to the Marketing Directors, the agency handling the leasing, monthly rates for studios range from \$1,200 to \$1,500; for one-bedrooms, \$1,600 to \$1,900; and for two-bedrooms, \$2,100 to

\$2,400.

At least at first, there will be no fee for use of any amenities, according to Mr. Russo. Mr. Barry said negotiations were under way to try to get several restaurants and convenience stores as tenants of the retail space built into the street level of the building near Frank E. Rodgers.

The hotel has been designed to include a retail concourse as well.

Meanwhile, an old brick warehouse directly across Frank E. Rodgers from Harrison Station is scheduled for demolition in November, said Jeff Milanaik, the president of Heller Industrial Parks, the owner. The plan is to redevelop that site with retail, office and residential space, he said.

The nearby PATH station, which opened 98 years ago, is to receive a \$173 million makeover for its centennial. Mr. Russo reported that the Port Authority, which will be commissioning the work, recently bought two small pieces of the Harrison Station site to create a connecting pedestrian walkway and a small plaza.

A sleek glass-and-steel covered pavilion for passengers has been designed to replace the station's cantilevered roofs, which do not cover the entire platform.

Mr. Barry described the Harrison Station apartment buildings as being designed to look "modern and exciting, while still respecting the industrial past of the neighborhood."

The area will be in transition for years, he noted, and the redevelopment plan does not aim to eradicate that industrial past. On the other hand, his company and Pegasus have been at work with paintbrushes and plywood to help present the neighborhood's nicest possible face as leasing begins. The rusty trestle bridge for the PATH, for example, is now coated in shades of aqua and green. Broken windows in some empty buildings on surrounding streets are being covered and painted with cheerful colors as well.

"We are not trying to pretend that Harrison is something it is not," Mr. Barry said. "It is a truly well-connected formerly industrial area, and we'll be addressing that head-on."