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Antinozzi Assoc. moving into Bijou offices

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BRIDGEPORT - An architectural firm is helping set the stage for downtown revival, moving from Stratford to a former theater building being renovated for both entertainment and commercial uses. **Antinozzi Associates** plans to move this spring into offices created from what was once a ballroom above the Bijou Theater on Fairfield Avenue, built in 1910 as one of the first showcases in the area created specifically for movies.

"If I stood on the roof of this building, I could point out 20 projects we've done in the past," said Paul **Antinozzi**, of **Antinozzi Associates**, surveying the neighborhood during a Thursday visit to the Bijou building. "Moving downtown is part of a continuing story that began with the founding of our firm in Stratford more than 50 years ago."

Antinozzi said the move, probably in late May or early June, puts his firm at the center of the city's downtown renewal program.

Major projects in progress include renovating the former Citytrust tower on Main Street and the former Arcade Mall and Hotel, also on Main Street, into apartments and commercial space.

Antinozzi's firm - now on Main Street, north of Paradise Green in Stratford - previously worked on plans to convert the former Central High School on Lyon Terrace into City Hall; renovated the former Sears automotive center into State Police Troop G barracks on Prospect Street, and built the railroad station on Water Street.

It is now designing the city's new elementary school on North Avenue and Oxford's high school.

"I thank **Antinozzi Associates** for deciding to relocate to the city to take part in its revitalization," Mayor John M. Fabrizi said, stopping by the Bijou to welcome the architects. "Its new office will provide a dynamic setting for employees to work and clients to visit."

Antinozzi's decision to relocate to Bridgeport is a counterpoint to the decision five years ago by Fletcher Thompson, one of the state's largest architectural firms, to move from Bridgeport to Shelton.

Fletcher Thompson officials cited high city personal property taxes, a reluctance by recruits to work in Bridgeport and municipal corruption at the time as its reasons for moving to Shelton.

Antinozzi will move to the Bijou following \$600,000 in work to establish a new 11,000-square-foot office for about 40 employees in the Bijou's second-floor ballroom.

The ballroom, with its balcony, chandeliers and distinctive windows, will retain its historic appearance, **Antinozzi** said.

Philip Kuchma, the developer of Bijou Square, initially said the former ballroom would be renovated into entertainment space.

But a subsequent plan to develop the space for **Antinozzi's** offices has been under consideration about three years.

Kuchma said the ballroom in its early days was called Colonial Hall, a dance and performance space.

It also was known as "Quilty's Ballroom," a reference to Daniel J. Quilty, a master dance instructor who taught all forms of dancing from waltz and polka to tap and ballet. Quilty offered classes there from the completion of the theater in 1910 until his death in 1950.

Meanwhile, Kuchma said renovations, including a new floor, are under way at the Bijou to prepare for its reopening as an art-film venue sometime in the spring. The movie house, which opened in 1910, has been closed since 1998.

Work on Two Boots Roadhouse, a bar/restaurant that also will have a performance area, is under way in a building next door to the theater. It is also expected to open in the spring.

The theater and the roadhouse will be operated by Philip and Jesse Hartman, who own the Pioneer Theater, a string of Two Boots pizza restaurants and Mo Pitkin's House of Satisfaction, a restaurant and nightclub, all in New York City.

Kuchma said **Antinozzi** also will work on plans to develop the rest of Bijou Square, which includes renovating buildings now occupied by the Schwerdtle Stamp Co. on Fairfield Avenue and Elm Street, into apartments, stores and restaurants.