

# Baltimore MESSENGER

Serving the city's northern neighborhoods

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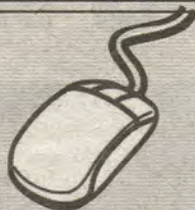
## What are you doing this weekend?

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If you're not going to our Web site on a daily basis, here's some of what you missed:



### » Fireworks clear fence, barely

The Fourth of July fireworks in Towson nearly fizzled out this year because a construction fence required by the school system fluctuated in size, cost and complexity over the course of several weeks. "It got 'curiouser' and 'curiouser,'" said David Nielson, whose community association, the Associates of Loch Raven Village, annually pays for the fireworks and provides manpower to make the bombs burst in air over Loch Raven Academy. The Associates had even voted this month to pay for the fence if it had to — to the tune of \$3,100 — but on Monday, county officials said that, instead, they will come up with the money in the form of a grant. Fireworks have been a tradition in Loch Raven for more than 40 years.

### » Navel maneuvers

The minister's daughter is a belly dancer. But it's OK. Her father, the Rev. Fred Rutledge, a retired minister for the First Unitarian Church in Baltimore, comes to her shows, according to Idlwyde resident Nina Rutledge. "He's a rather liberated old gent. Unitarians are multicultural anyway," Rutledge said. "And usually when he comes to a show, he can watch all the belly dancers that aren't his daughter. He likes that. What we do is sensual, not sexual. It has a rich cultural heritage history."

Also at [www.baltimoremessenger.com](http://www.baltimoremessenger.com)

## Baltimore MESSENGER

10750 Little Patuxent Parkway Columbia, MD 21044

### General Information

410-995-1667

### Senior Vice President of Targeted

Print: Trish M. Carroll

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### Editorial

Phone: 410-955-1667; Fax: 410-997-0885

Editorial e-mail: [messenger@patuxent.com](mailto:messenger@patuxent.com)

(include information in the body of the message, rather than in an attachment).

Managing Editor: Elizabeth Eck

Editor: Larry Perl

Sports Editor: Nelson Coffin

Reporters: Adam Bednar; Craig Clary, sports;  
Tom Worgo, sports



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## NEWS

# Old jail latest challenge for Ruscombe rehabber

\$1 million project will build offices, possibly cafe

By Loni Ingraham

[lingraham@patuxent.com](mailto:lingraham@patuxent.com)

As he contemplated his latest challenge in the world of development and restoration, Marty Azola last week was focused on the old Warden's Building in Towson, on the northwest corner of Bosley Avenue and Towsontown Boulevard.

Most people call it "the old jail," because even though the warden lived in the front of the nearly 160-year-old building, the back of the building housed layers of cells where prisoners were kept.

But whether you think of it as the old jail or the warden's building, it's neither: it's Azola's building.

Baltimore County on June 8 approved leasing the structure for \$1 a year for the next 100 years to Towson Jail Associates LLC, which is an Azola Companies venture.

It's not exactly a free ride. Towson Jail Associates will pay \$6,000 a year in lieu of property taxes, and that amount will increase 3 percent each year, according to the lease.

Azola is president of Azola Companies, the family-owned firm that employs his children and his wife, Lone. She handles the books and property management; he's an expert in design and adaptive reuse of historic buildings and sits on the board of the Maryland Historic Trust.

Azola is best known in north Baltimore for rehabbing the old Ruscombe Mansion in Coldspring-Newtown as office and retail space last year. It opened in October with tenants including a travel club and the Jones Falls Watershed Association.

Other projects have included the Bromo Seltzer Tower downtown, Trinity Episcopal Church in Towson and the Oregon Grille in Baltimore County.

Azola is committed to converting the old jail into an office building.

He believes small offices — which the architecture of the building might dictate

— might be ideal for lawyers who are not in group practices.

But he still want to be close to Towson court buildings.

Azola said he's also contemplating a cafe for the building as well, if he's able to get the zoning variance he would need.

If he does, he might call it something clever like "The Joint," he said, in deference to the "pretty interesting graffiti" the women who last occupied the cells left behind when they moved to the new county detention center on Kenilworth Drive three years ago.

In any case, he said, he could have new

'Sometimes, the most painful projects are the best teachers. The more you do, the better you get.'

Marty Azola,  
developer

space ready by late winter or early spring of next year, if he can start the work immediately.

But last week Azola was not thinking about that. Nor was he thinking about the \$1 million it's going to cost him to renovate the building, or about the federal and states tax credits that will help mitigate the cost.

He also wasn't thinking too much just yet about how he's going to integrate the required 40 percent of the jail cells into a new design.

"You can't gut the very reason it was built and call it a restoration," he said.

And he wasn't even dwelling much on



the conference room the building will feature, providing meeting space for neighborhood groups and a "public purpose" that justifies the lease of public property to a private entity.

What Azola was thinking about was the 250-pound boulder that's a remnant of a collapsed chimney on the highest floor of the building.

In his mind's eye, he sees it potentially crashing through floor after floor of the building like a giant meteor.

Last week, he was thinking how quickly he needed to get it out of there before it falls and kills somebody.

He was also thinking about how he and his crew are going to have to crawl around the building and do some poking to determine how to remove some of the cells without the structure caving in.

That could be a problem.

But more than anything else, he said he was thinking about how after 35 years of "saving Baltimore, one building at a time," he's ready to save the Warden's Building, too.

"Sometimes, the most painful projects are the best teachers," Azola said. "The more you do, the better you get. We're pretty good at it by now."

He said his LLC will probably borrow \$750,000 toward the project.

"We'll put our own money in for the rest," he said.

There will be a sizable mortgage payment to meet, he said, and they'll need rents to cover that.

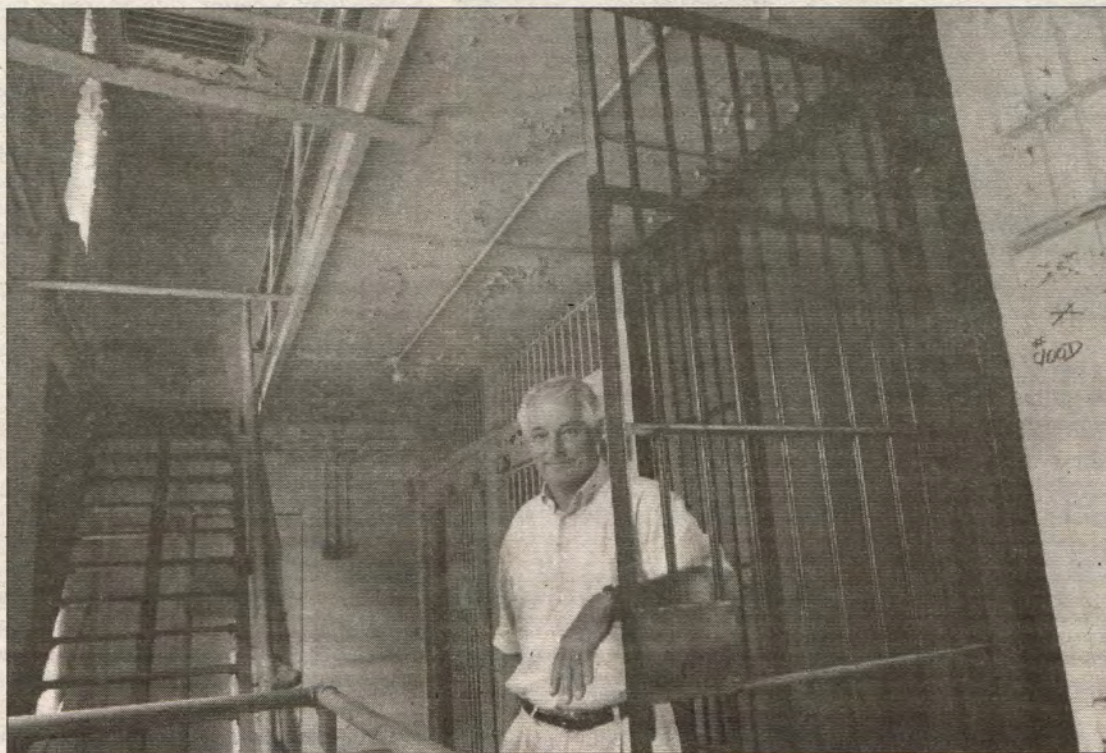
"We hope to have something left over," he said. "In a perfect world, we would pay ourselves as the general contractor with a little markup."

And while there's concern over little things like the boulder and a mountain-sized restoration challenge, it's matched by the delight he shows in little discoveries—such as finding the original wall paper beneath 10 layers of paint in one of the rooms.

New construction is all right, he said. But saving a building is special, he said, "and it puts food on our table, even though it may be not much food."

Azola notes that his first boss in the industry was a Greek architect, who told him that if he really enjoyed and loved what he did, he would feel a glow of accomplishment and pride.

He's looking forward to that.



**Above:** Developer Marty Azola is looking forward to remodeling the old Baltimore County Detention Center, but he's concerned about the structural effect of removing some of the cells.

**Left:** Developer Marty Azola stands near cells in the former Baltimore County Detention Center. He plans to remodel the building into office space and, possibly, a cafe.

PHOTOS BY STEVE RUARK