

THE BALTIMORE SUN



baltimoresun.com

Informing more than 1 million Maryland readers weekly in print and online

Price \$1. Our 172nd year, No. 170

FRIDAY

June 19, 2009

Former delegate Gisriel disbarred

Michael U. Gisriel, a former House of Delegates member, a real estate attorney and former *Baltimore Sun* columnist, was disbarred for cashing a \$1,000 check belonging to his former clients.

In a decision issued Thursday, the Maryland Court of Appeals said Gisriel's conduct in his client's case was exacerbated by his "hubris" in handling the check.

Two judges on the state's highest court dissented and called for a suspension rather than disbarment, noting no prior disciplinary action against Gisriel, who has been a member of the Maryland Bar since 1976.

Reached at his law office in Towson, Gisriel said he'll continue work as a lobbyist in Annapolis and provide real estate title services.

"Obviously, I'm very disappointed, especially after my unblemished 32-year legal career," he said.

Gisriel was a member of the House of Delegates from 1987 to 1991 and was a writer for the *Sun's* Q&A column on real estate issues in the late 1990s.

The matter stemmed from a 2004 incident in which Gisriel was mistakenly sent a settlement check intended for his former clients. Gisriel argued that his behavior was unintentional, while the court said his action was dishonest.

—Hanah Cho

DAILY BRIEFING

Judge approves new owner for Filene's Basement

NEW YORK — Filene's Basement has a new owner. A bankruptcy judge on Wednesday approved Syms Corp. and Vornado Realty Trust's \$62.4 million bid for the company. The off-price chain filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in May and sought a buyer. After Filene's announced last week that Men's Wearhouse was buying it, other bidders objected and said Men's Wearhouse didn't meet the court's requirements. A judge in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Wilmington, Del., directed Filene's last week to reopen the auction. The Filene's store at the Inner Harbor of Baltimore would have closed under the deal with Men's Wearhouse, but will be remain open under Syms' ownership.

—From *Sun* staff and news services

Jobless benefit rolls post first dip since January



BALTIMORE SUN PHOTO: TASHA TREADWELL

The 1860s-era Ruscombe, former home of a nesting black vulture, was one of 10 projects honored by Baltimore Heritage. Now called the Stone Mansion, it houses a cafe, other businesses and nonprofits, and the headquarters of its developer, the Azola Cos.

Preserving the past

Baltimore Heritage presents awards for Stone Mansion, other projects in the city

By Edward Gunts
ED.GUNTS@BALTSUN.COM

Some preservationists fight bulldozers and wrecking balls. Marty and Tony Azola had to outwit a black vulture.

The female vulture laid eggs in the attic of Ruscombe, a vacant 1860s-era mansion near Cylburn Arboretum that the Azolas proposed to restore for commercial tenants. Because the black vulture is a migratory species protected by law, the father-and-son development team had to wait until her eggs hatched and she and her offspring flew away before they could begin work. She came back the next year and laid eggs again, delaying the project even more.

Finally, the Azolas boarded up the building enough to keep the vulture out and were able to complete their restoration. The building at 4901 Springarden Drive, now called the Stone Mansion, is fully leased with a cafe and a mix of private businesses and nonprofits, as well as the headquarters of the Azola Cos. In

the lobby are photos of the vulture's eggs and chicks as reminders of their not-so-brief tenancy in the "Vulture's Suite."

"We've had bats and snakes and rats in our buildings before, but this was a first," Marty Azola said.

The Stone Mansion was one of 10 projects honored Thursday night at the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion by Baltimore Heritage, a citywide preservation advocacy group.

Johns Hopkins, executive director of Baltimore Heritage, said he was surprised by the wide range of projects, groups and locations that were nominated, despite the economic downturn.

"We had as strong a pool as ever," he said. "No two projects were in the same neighborhood. Many of the developers and architects and contractors are being recognized for the first time. To me, that shows that preservation is strong throughout the city."

Other projects receiving preservation awards were: Lloyd Street Synagogue at 15 Lloyd St., owned by the Jewish Muse-

um of Maryland; 16 W. Madison St., a building that houses offices for Agora Inc.; 901 N. Milton Ave., a former garment factory recycled as a center for nonprofits; Mount Calvary Church, 816 N. Eutaw St.; St. Casimir Church at 2739 O'Donnell St.; and the home of Brenda and Jeffrey Smith on Harford Road in Lauraville.

Preservation Honor Awards went to 801 Washington Blvd., a commercial building in Pigtown; Joe and Ann Schultz of Schultz Development, for restoring houses around Patterson Park; and *Baltimore's Alley Houses: Homes for Working People Since the 1970s*, a book by Mary Ellen Hayward.

A final award was presented to City Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke, the Tuscany-Canterbury Neighborhood Association and seven individuals for their efforts to prevent demolition of the Scottish Rite Temple at 3800 N. Charles St. and Castalia at 200 Tuscany Road, the former residence of the first headmaster of the Calvert School. Both are no longer threatened with demolition.