

Baltimore MESSENGER

Serving the city's northern neighborhoods

www.baltimoremessenger.com

Volume 41, Number 41 | Week of July 22, 2010

NEWS

Its inmates long gone, historic jail in rehab

By Loni Ingraham
lingraham@patuxent.com

Marty Azola has a small, nameless dilemma.

The president of the Azola Companies, a Baltimore-based building rehabilitation firm, is best known in north Baltimore as redeveloper of the old Ruscombe Mansion in Coldspring-Newtown. Now, all financing and agreements with Baltimore County are finalized for his plans to convert the Old Towson Jail on Bosley Avenue in Towson.

Work is well under way to turn the 160-year-old, three-story, Italianate-style stone building with its central tower into office suites, a reuse similar to Ruscombe.

The dilemma for Azola is to give the building a name that will capitalize on its peculiar cachet — without its negative connotations.

After all, one can hardly expect attorneys, business people and — especially in this day and age, financial folks — to list their address on a business card as a “jail.”

Azola has appointed Towson-based Latshaw Commercial Real Estate Advisors as broker for the project and given president Bob Latshaw the go-ahead to seek tenants.

“We haven’t selected a name yet,” Latshaw said. “For now, the working title is Historic Towson Executive Suites.”

In truth, Azola said, the building was the warden’s house, not the jail.

However, the warden and his family cohabitated with the dozens of prisoners who occupied the cells, which were stacked three floors high at the rear of the house.

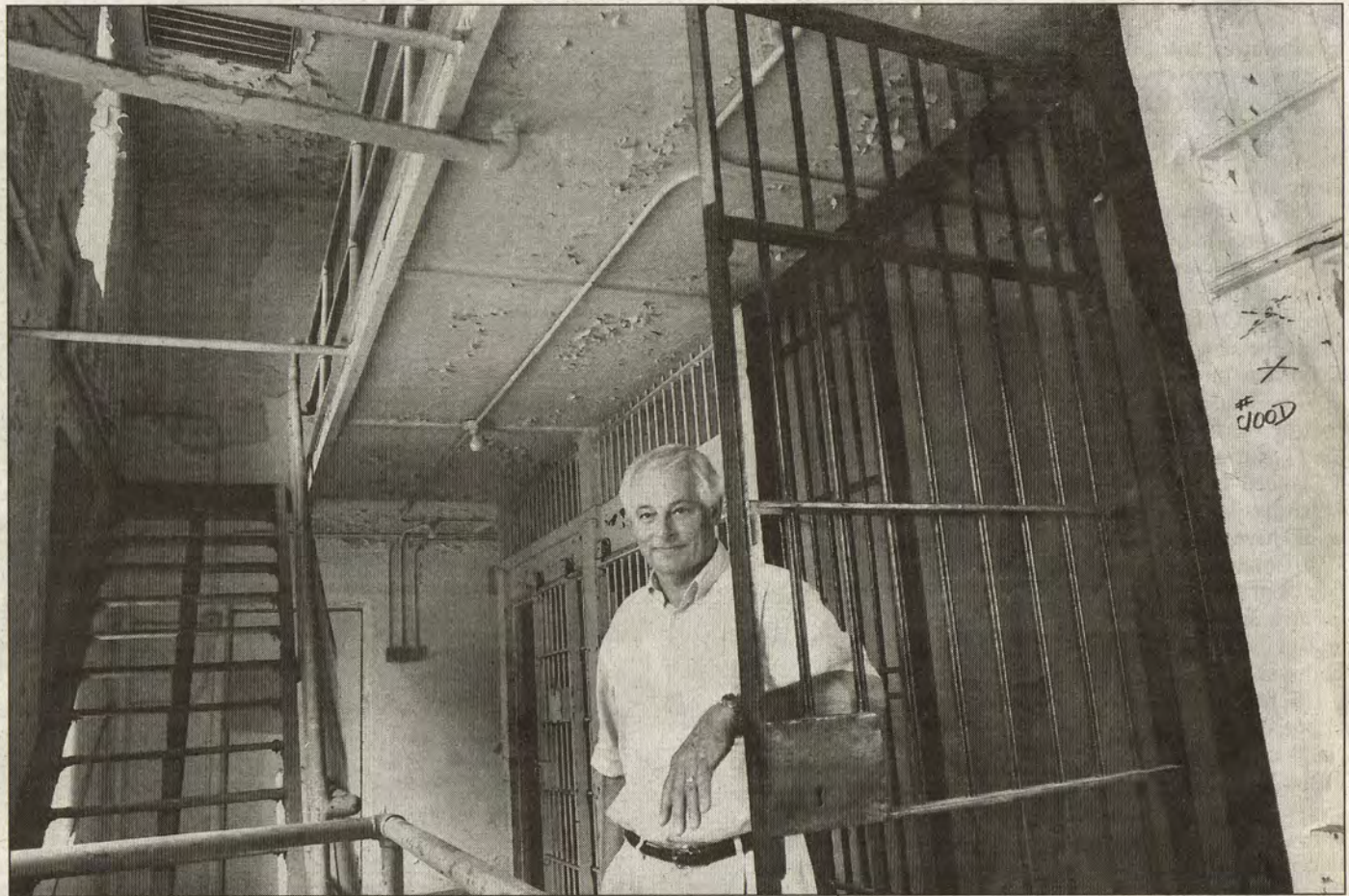
The building, on the corner of Bosley Avenue and Towsontown Boulevard, will be converted into small office and solo suites, with a shared conference room, kitchen and media center.

Those who lease offices in the old jail will have the privilege of working in a space restored and recreated by Azola, who Latshaw called, “probably the premier historical renovator in the state. He does magnificent work.”

A large skylight and chandelier over the walnut staircase will illuminate the entry foyer, and many offices will feature hardwood floors, high ceilings and fireplaces, he said.

In addition, cells on the ground floor will be leased for storage, he said.

Latshaw said rents will likely range from



FILE PHOTO /2009

Above: Marty Azola stands last June near jail cells in the Old Towson Jail, which he is redeveloping. The site is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Left: The jail, seen here from the exterior at Boseley Avenue and Towsontown Boulevard, had one famous inmate in 1972 — Arthur Bremmer, who shot George Wallace in Laurel.



\$375 per month to \$2,000, depending on the number of rooms, windows and other amenities.

“Somebody might want a whole floor,” he said.

The building is not only a local landmark, it’s listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Azola plans to tap into that history — he says he’ll prominently display the handcuffs and billy club used by the then-county sheriff, Thomas R. Jenifer, in 1891.

They’ve been donated to him by Jenifer’s great, great, great-granddaughter, Lillian Jenifer, of Long Island Farm, in Cromwell Valley.

Azola said he has also searching for more mementos. Workers are excavating dirt in

the common airshaft for the 36 cells.

“You’ve got to believe things were thrown down there,” he said.

The building has had at least one famous occupant. It briefly “accommodated” Arthur Bremer in 1972. Bremer was the would-be assassin who shot Democratic presidential candidate and former Alabama governor George Wallace in Laurel.

Bemer’s stay was short — just overnight — but it’s a plus to the overall history of the building, according to Trish Bentz, executive director of the Baltimore County Historical Trust, which works to see that the county’s historic or significant building are preserved.

“It’s always nice for a building to have some notoriety,” she said.