

AND

Home at last in New Cassel

■ **Revitalization project gets public unveiling**

■ **New tenants, chosen by lottery, eager to move**

BY JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER
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Yesterday morning's rain couldn't dampen the smile of Yolonda Stinson, a single mother who secured a new apartment in New Cassel's downtown redevelopment project.

Stinson, 32, threw her name into last month's lottery for a spot in one of two newly constructed buildings that include 50 apartments and retail space as part of the hamlet's \$60-million revitalization project.

"When I saw the opportunity to step up a little for me and my boys, I thought I'd apply," Stinson said of her sons, 10 and 12.

Town of North Hempstead officials and others huddled under a tent in front of one of the buildings on Prospect Avenue to unveil that part of an overall revitalization project.

"We never gave up," said Town Supervisor Jon Kaiman. While North Hempstead as a whole is one of the wealthiest areas in the nation, the New Cassel revitalization is a testament to ensuring that all residents "live with dignity," he said.

"I want this place to look like down on Franklin Avenue

in Garden City," Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-Mineola) recalled saying early in the project development, referring to the strip of upscale shops. It's a vision McCarthy said was becoming a reality.

Town Councilwoman Viviana Russell said that when she first moved to the area 11 years ago, abandoned buildings and crumbling shops lined the streets.

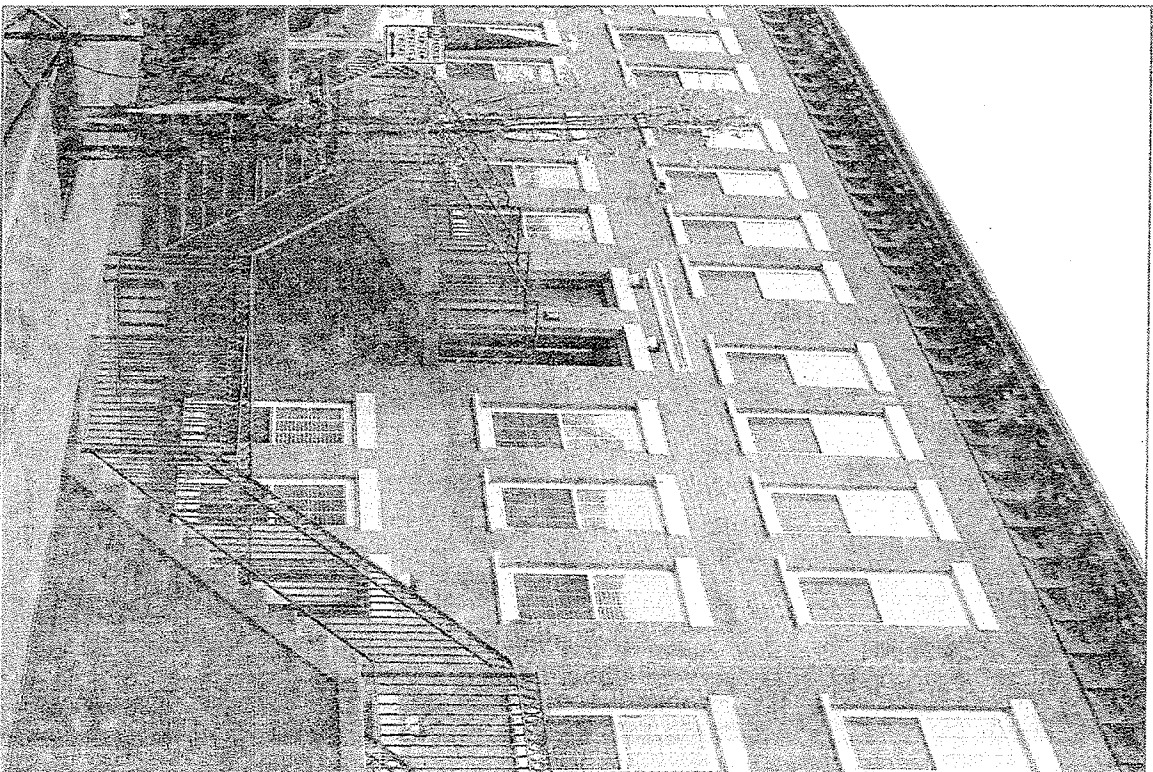
Sherril-Ann and Mitch Innes, who also won an apartment in the lottery, toured a two-bedroom unit as Mitch Innes, 26, an Army veteran who spent three years in Iraq, carried their 8-month-old daughter.

"I love it. It's wonderful," Sherril-Ann Innes said as she opened closets. "The baby will have her own room."

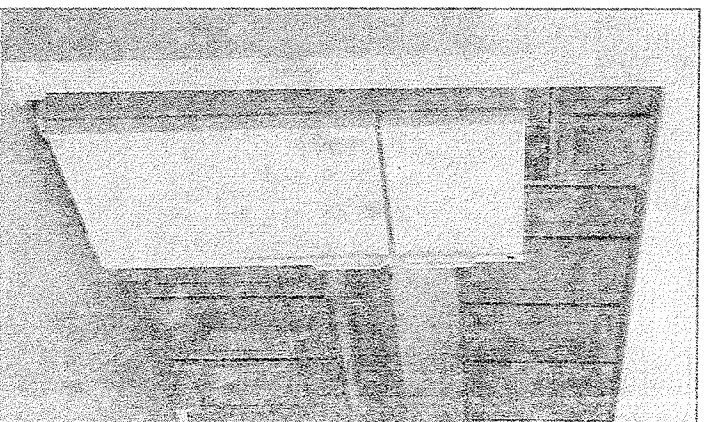
All residents of the two new buildings were selected through the lottery, with preference given to current New Cassel residents.

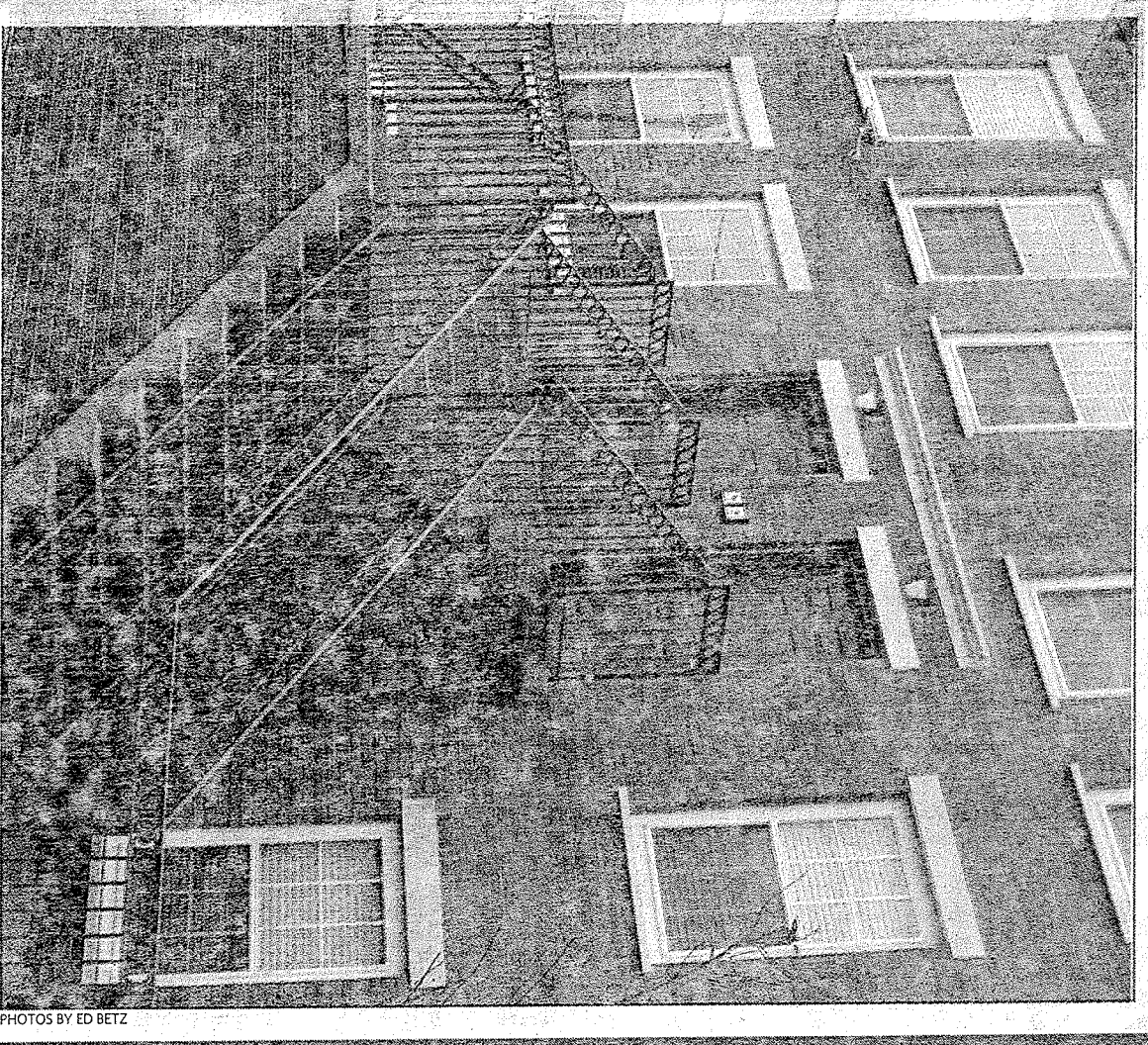
The town has selected lottery winners for the remaining 48 apartments, but continues to check their financial qualifications. Winners must have a household income ranging from \$26,000 to \$72,000, depending on family size.

A variety of work continues in the area. Prospect Avenue is being reconstructed with \$8.5 million in federal stimulus funds. Nassau County Legis. Robert Troiano (D-Westbury) promised that a party will be held along the thoroughfare in the spring after it's completed.



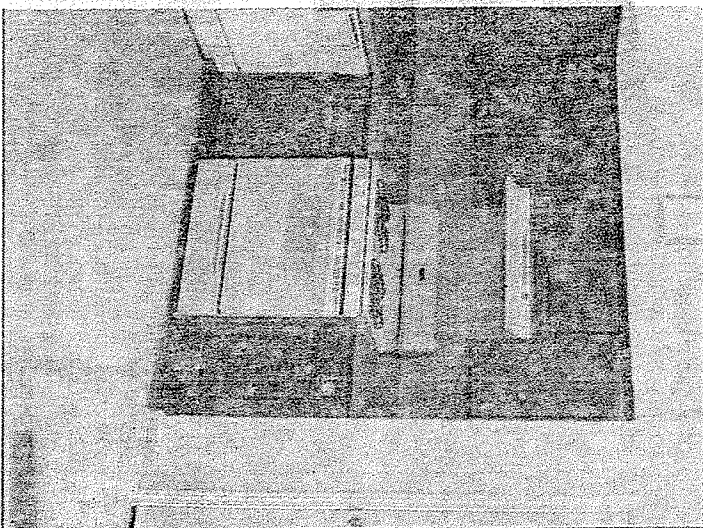
The New Cassel apartment building where residents such as





PHOTOS BY ED BETZ

Yolonda Stinson, bottom left, will be living. Below right, a typical kitchen.



North Hempstead officials yesterday unveiled two newly constructed buildings representing \$181 million of New/Cassell's \$60 million redevelopment project.

Apartments: 50 units.

Retail: 16,000 square feet of retail space.

Developer: First Sterling Financial Inc.

Rents: Range from \$819 for a one-bedroom apartment to \$1,400 for three bedrooms.

Selection: Residents are chosen in a lottery, which began last month.

Applicants: 173 applicants, 79 from New/Cassell.

Income requirements: \$26,000 to \$72,000, depending on family size.

Mineola schools eye options

BY JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER
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Voters in the Mineola school district sent a clear message in striking down a \$6.7-million bond that would have resulted in the closure of three elementary schools: "They don't want this configuration," Superintendent Michael Nagler said yesterday.

The proposal defeated Tuesday would have closed Cross Street in Williston Park, Meadow Drive in Albertson and Hampton Street in Mineola while expanding classrooms in Willis Avenue and Jackson Avenue.

"This board will honor and move forward with what the residents want," said trustee Christine Napolitano, who was in favor of the bond.

Due to declining enrollment, the district still must close at least two schools, Nagler has said.

The district's next step will be to ask voters to approve a \$4.4-million bond that would keep the middle and high schools intact and build more classrooms at Jackson to make it a school for grades 3-5. Pre-kindergarten through second grade would be split between Willis Avenue in Mineola and Meadow Drive. Voters also will have an option to approve an additional \$1.7-million bond that would close Willis instead of Hampton, Nagler explained.

If voters reject those bonds, the default configuration will be: pre-K to second grade at Willis and Meadow, grades 3-4 at Jackson. Fifth-graders would go to the middle school, eighth-graders to the high school. Cross and Hampton would close.

Nagler said he believes the \$4.4-million bond option is a "truer compromise." A date for voting hasn't been set, he said.

Board member John McGrath, who is against closing any schools, said he's "thrilled" with the vote results: "I think we really may need to slow the process down."

After Tuesday's rejection, he said he's confident voters will vote down another bond proposal. "It was the perfect storm of 'No,'" he said. "There was something in there for everybody to hate."

Some parents didn't like moving fifth-graders to the middle school and eighth-graders to the high school, while others were opposed to building a rooftop playground at Willis.

Dara Perlow, co-president of the parent-teacher association at Jackson, said she's one of the moms who didn't like the rooftop playground. But closing three schools was the deciding factor: "It doesn't make sense to me that we were going to close schools and then spend a very large amount of money."