

## Monument of history now gone Smokestacks of past make way for fresh future

BY PAUL SINGLEY  
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

NAUGATUCK — Many borough outsiders who knew little about the community only knew Naugatuck as the little factory town by the river.

And if they knew how to spell Naugatuck, it's probably only because the name, which means lone tree by the river, was emblazoned on the smokestack that resembled a giant tree by the river.

Last week, both smokestacks at the former Uniroyal Chemical Co. property were demolished, taking with them the last remaining reminders of the borough's largest former factory of rubber and chemical products that once employed 9,500 people. The little factory town is no longer.

"The smokestacks that have symbolically represented our industrial past are gone now," said Chester Cornacchia, chairman of the Naugatuck Economic Development Commission.

Referring to a downtown revitalization project known as Renaissance Place that will include alternative energy solutions, he said, "An era has ended and a new one begun.

See **NAUGATUCK**, Page **B2**



JIM SHANNON REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

The second smokestack at the former Uniroyal Chemical Co. plant in Naugatuck tumbles to the ground Thursday as workers from Brandenburg Demolition Co. of Illinois take down the towers.

## NAUGATUCK: New vision paints a brighter future

*Continued from **B1***

Windmills and solar panels will rise in their place to usher in a new era of invention and vision."

The story of Naugatuck is like that of many of America's former industrial towns. Most didn't know what to do with themselves after the factories left.

"Naugatuck isn't unique," said state Rep. Kevin DeGobbo, R-Naugatuck. "It is a story that is true of manufacturing towns all throughout the Northeast. From the brass in Waterbury, to the rubber and chemicals in Naugatuck; you can see that same story in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

"I think in all of these communities there was this sense that industry is gone but something else will replace it," he said. "People thought economic cycles come and go and things will just happen. And in reality, we've come to see, and we've seen it in other places in the country, that it's not just going to happen on its own anymore."

Naugatuck struggled year after year to bring back jobs and replace tax revenue that left with the factories. Several proposals to rebuild on some of Uniroyal's former parcels in downtown, such as on Parcel C on the corner of Maple and Water streets, have failed.

Then Naugatuck discovered a developer who promised a new future for the borough, one that would bring new jobs and new hope for people. His name was Alexius C. Conroy, and his idea of a renaissance was a \$707 million, mixed-used, residential and commercial, downtown revitalization project. Conroy's work had pumped new life into former struggling cities such as Providence, R.I., where his Providence Place project has thrived.

Still, Naugatuck residents were skeptical at first. But when one of their largest remaining factories, Peter Paul Hershey, relocated to Virginia last year and took with it 220 jobs and more than a halfmillion dollars in annual tax revenue, taxpayers decided to give Conroy's project a shot. Despite a strong effort to hinder progress by a vocal minority, taxpayers voted overwhelmingly in May to support the change Renaissance Place promised.

The referendum is what DelGobbo calls the "moment when Naugatuck residents stepped up and defined where they wanted to go as a community."

The first phase of the fourphase Renaissance Place project will bring 2,500 construction jobs and 950 on-site jobs. It will also bring an annual \$4.4 million in tax revenue. The overall plan, which will take 15 years to complete, will bring a mix of upscale condominiums, shopping centers, restaurants, entertainment venues, hotels, office spaces and more to the downtown area. Much of the project will be built on former Uniroyal properties in downtown. The project will become what Naugatuck will be known for, officials say. "Our community has officially graduated from a 'brown' industrial economy that was built on people's backs, to a 'green' progressive and innovative economy," Cornacchia said.



REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN ARCHIVES

**This is an artist's rendering of the Renaissance Place downtown revitalization in Naugatuck. The project will come to symbolize the borough, much as former factories like Uniroyal once did, local officials say.**