

15 PHILADELPHIA
FILM FESTIVAL
A PHILADELPHIA FILM SOCIETY PRODUCTION
MARCH 30 - APRIL 11, 2006

A MIXED BAG

The festival promises big names, star-power titles, edgy works and family-friendly fare. **D 1**

VILLAGE OF COMMERCE

A former cigar factory in Hilltown is being transformed into an experimental office space. **E 1**



The Intelligencer

Sunday, March 26, 2006

Serving communities in Bucks and Montgomery counties

On the Web at www.phillyburbs.com

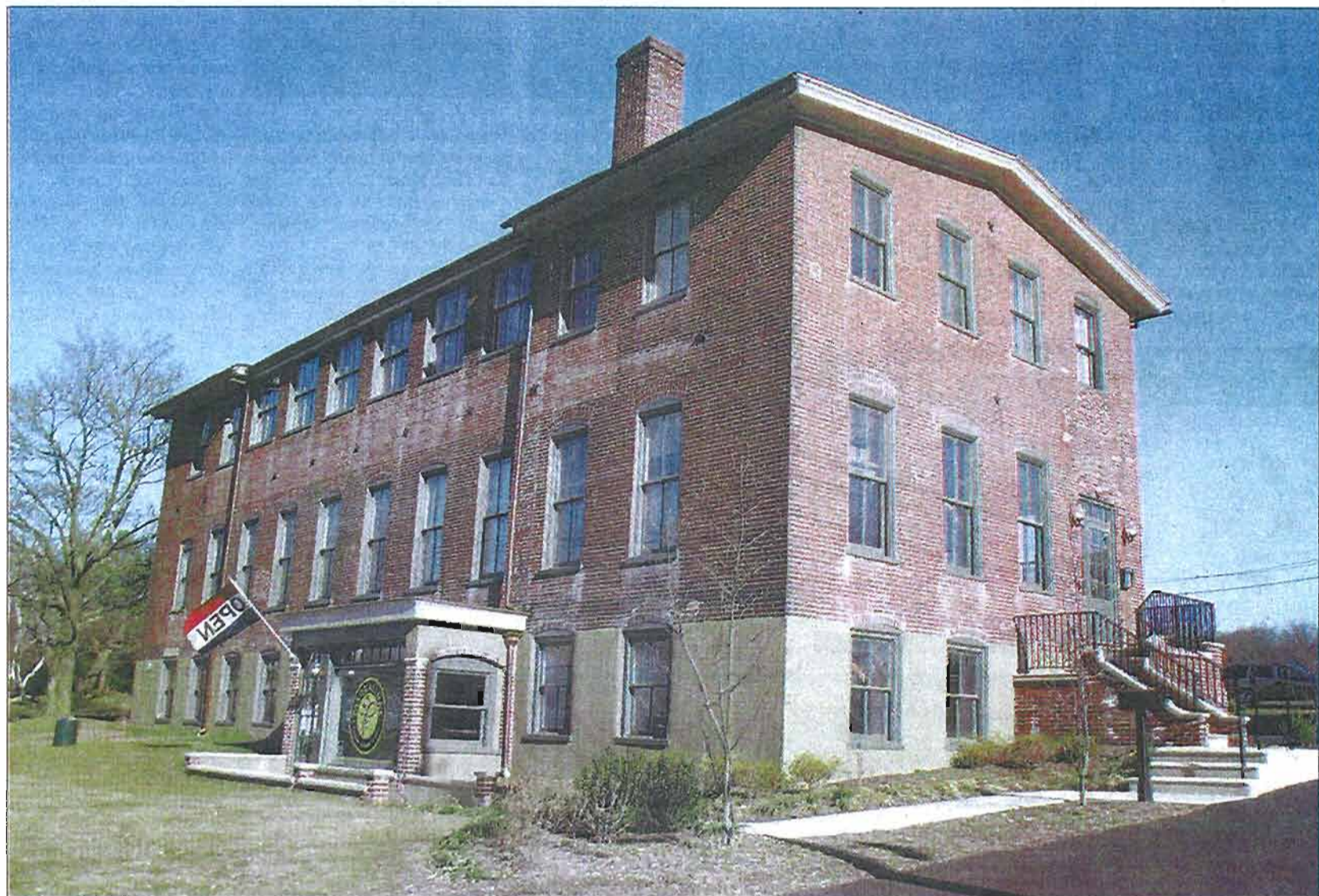
\$1.50

BUSINESS



www.phillyburbs.com

TheIntelligencer



Laurence Kelly/the Intelligencer

This former cigar factory in Blooming Glen, Hilltown Township has been turned into office suites targeting people running a small business out of their home.

Community of commerce

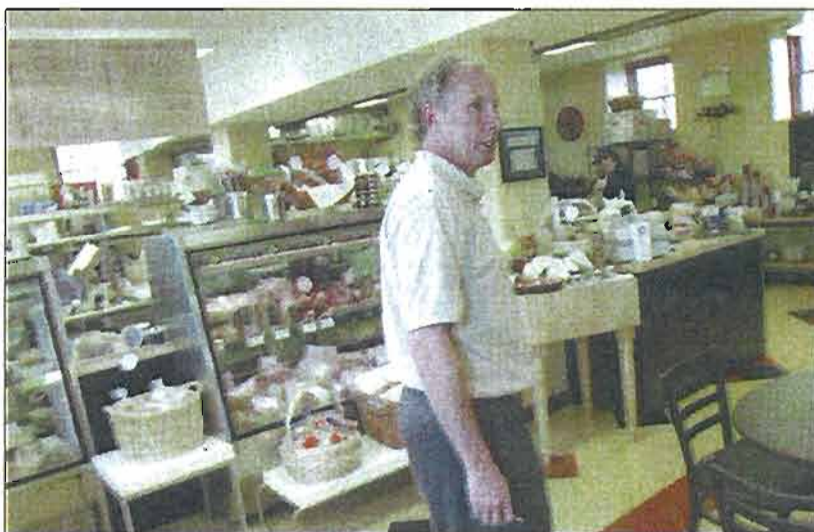
A Hilltown developer is converting a 100-year-old cigar factory into an experimental office space where small businesses share conference, copy and coffee rooms.

BY JOHN WILEN
THE INTELLIGENCER

It was love at first sight. David Halliday, a construction industry veteran who had recently converted an old pants factory in Pipersville into an office building, was looking for another project.

"I was riding around, looking for buildings," Halliday recalls.

He found exactly what he wanted in an old cigar factory in Blooming Glen, a historic village on Route 113



David Halliday tours the Village Center, which is also home to an Italian deli.

in Hilltown Township. The building, built in 1910, was abandoned. But it was perfect, Halliday recalls.

Today, the building is home to an Italian deli and market, and the first nine of what could be as many as 17

office suites.

But Village Center Suites are far from just another small suburban office building. Aside from the former factory's distinctive appearance and original features — many of

MORE INFO

To contact Village Center:
(267) 614-5353
www.vcsuites.com

which Halliday has retained — the building is designed as shared office space. Halliday says that concept is experimental in a rural setting.

In most small office buildings, tenants have their own office "apartments" and may only see other tenants on the way in or out. Tenants at Village Center have their own offices, but use common conference, copy and coffee rooms. There is a single reception area, and all offices are accessed off a central hallway.

It's practically impossible for tenants not to bump into other businesspersons in Village Center. The idea, Halliday says, is to spark interaction.

And it appears to be working.

See **CENTER**, Page **E 2**

Center

Continued from Page E 1

"I wanted to be part of the community of commerce," said Henry Rosenberger, one of Halliday's first tenants. Rosenberger owns Tussock Sedge Farm, 500-acre organic beef farm that surrounds Blooming Glen.

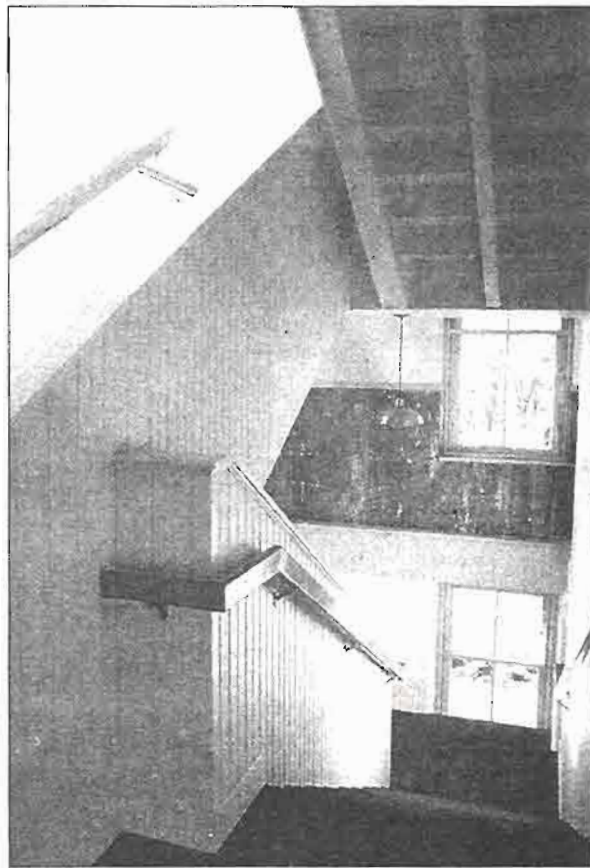
Rosenberger says he moved his office from his farm to Halliday's building to "connect with other people. ... It gives you an opportunity to network."

"By pooling your office space with related professionals, you can enjoy the synergy of building your referral base with other similar noncompeting businesses," writes Darrell Zahorsky, a small business expert and editor of About.com's small business information site, in a recent report.

Village Center's target market is people running a small business out of their home who are ready to move up to a real office, Halliday said.

"It's specifically designed for the much smaller office space (user)," Halliday said.

But while the building offers free amenities like color printing and an automatic espresso machine, it's not terribly expensive. Square foot rental rates run from \$4.66 to \$8.46, depending on office size. Office space in Horsham's Pennsylvania Business Campus, by comparison, was



Laurence Kelly/The Intelligencer

The renovated stairway retains some of the rough feel of the cigar factory.

renting for about \$20 a square foot in the fourth quarter, according to real estate firm Grubb & Ellis.

"We're trying to create a Class-A space at a little less

Start than half of what Class A would cost," Halliday said.

Low rent can be a big boost for small businesses, Zahorsky says.

"What many startup entre-



Halliday will wait to see which kind of office is most popular on the building's finished second floor before completing the third.



Tenants at Village Center have their own offices but use common conference, copy and coffee rooms.

feel. High ceilings and large exterior windows are complemented by a liberal use of windows inside. Lines of sight run from one side of the building to the other, and light flows through unobstructed. Those are key features when the largest office is 14 feet by 15 feet.

Halliday has retained many of the building's original features, including brick walls and exposed beams. "The building was originally developed by the Blooming Glen Improvement Co. and designed by architect Oscar A. Martin for the Uneek-Havana Cigar Co. Uneek did-

preneurs or home office company owners come to realize is an office space can be a large overhead expense and a cash drain on precious capital," Zahorsky writes.

Unlike many new office buildings, Village Center has ample character and an open

n't last long — about a decade. Subsequent tenants included a clothing manufacturer and a furniture refinisher. By the time Halliday drove by, the building had been abandoned for several years.

Halliday looked up the owner in county property records. He was told the building wasn't for sale. The next day, the owner called back: "He said, 'Well, my wife would like me to sell,'" Halliday recalls.

Halliday bought the building for \$275,000, and has put about \$500,000 into major renovations, including removal of an old loading dock, reconfiguring a front door out of a former garage opening, cleaning up oil from the ground floor, gutting the building, rewiring it and fitting it for broadband Internet service.

He's not done. The third floor has yet to be finished. Halliday will wait to see which kind of office is most popular on the building's finished second floor before completing the third.

Halliday sees the project as an experiment, but sees the four tenants who have moved in during the month he's had an occupancy permit as a sign it will work out as planned.

"There's something about the character of an old building," Halliday said.

John Wilen can be reached at (215) 957-8187 or jwilen@phillyburbs.com.