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In North Providence, construction everywhere

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NORTH PROVIDENCE -- The seeds of renewal and rebirth began to sprout this year as several building and improvement projects took big steps forward.

Workers began renovating and expanding Dr. Edward A. Ricci and Birchwood Schools to transform them into the town's first two middle schools, due to open in next fall for students in grades six to eight. Education advocates have long said that the town needs to create schools that specialize in meeting the needs of these students.

Renovations began as soon as school let out for the summer. When students returned for the fall, construction crews began laying the foundation for new classrooms and gymnasiums for both schools. Mayor A. Ralph Mollis, who has spearheaded the projects with Supt. Paul Vorro, said they remain on schedule and are expected to be completed on budget, for about \$11 million.

Meanwhile, the town completed a land swap that is expected to result in a new shopping plaza in Centredale's business district and a new senior center about a mile down Smith Street.

The deal landed the town 64,000 square feet of land on Atlantic Boulevard, formerly the site of the Ronci jewelry factory. Soon after, a sign went up announcing it as the future home of the Salvatore Mancini Resource & Activity Center. Plans for a new center had long been in the works and gained momentum a year ago when the town won a \$2-million federal grant.

The project is expected to go out to bid next month, with construction to begin by April, according to John Fleming, the mayor's chief of staff. The building should open by the end of next year.

In exchange for the Atlantic Boulevard land, the town traded nearly 3 acres in the village center with the understanding that developers Benjamin and Jason Sisto would fashion it into a shopping center anchored by a relocated Centredale post office and in harmony with planned improvements for the village. As the year wound down, the developers unveiled architectural drawings showing a plaza with a village atmosphere and began grading work on the vacant parcel.

Other signs of the mayor's long-proposed revitalization of Centredale became reality. In the fall, workers undertook a \$300,000 facelift of Town Hall, resulting in new sidewalks and steps in front of the building. Other improvements will include the installation of period streetlights, the sprucing up of the war monument area and the repair of the long broken clock tower.

Almost the entire village center will get a makeover next year for about \$1.9 million. The state Department of Transportation will pick up about half the tab. The project will result in brick-banded sidewalks, period streetlights, landscaping and benches.

Fleming said the work will begin in the late spring or early summer and will be nearly completed by the end of the year. Marieville underwent similar revitalization work this past year; all that remains to do is some landscaping work and brick crosswalks, to be done in the spring, Fleming said.

While the town strived to breathe new life into Centredale and Marieville, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency continued efforts to clean up pollution at the nearby Woonasquatucket River Superfund site. Early in 1999, tests revealed high levels of dioxin and other contaminants along the river, in the area of the Centredale Manor senior apartment complex.

This past year, the EPA announced an interim plan to deal with the contaminants. It called for restoring Allendale Dam, which was breached 10 years ago, and allowing the water level in Allendale Pond to rise and cover most of the contaminated sediments. The contaminants left exposed would then be excavated, transported out of town and incinerated. Work on the dam began in the fall, while the sediment removal will take place next year.

The following are some of the local news highlights of 2001:

In politics, Mayor A. Ralph Mollis decided in November not to run for lieutenant governor. He had expressed interest

in the position until fellow Democrat, Charles J. Fogarty, announced that he would seek reelection to the seat instead of vying for governor.

At the General Assembly, several North Providence legislators won leadership positions in the Senate. John Celona became chairman of the Corporations Committee, Joseph Montalbano took the helm of the Judiciary Committee and Graziano assumed control of the Health, Education and Welfare Committee.

In February, the state police accused a parishioner at St. Anthony Church of pocketing some of the money from collection plates that she helped count. The police were tipped off by Rev. Edward Cardente, who conducted his own investigation of missing donations using hidden cameras. Mindy Andreozzi, 42, was charged with six counts of embezzlement. Her case is slated to go to trial in 2002.

Also in February, an ex-con who had served time for manslaughter apparently killed his former wife in his apartment and then shot himself, the police said. Witnesses told the police that they had heard arguing and gunshots before the police stormed the apartment and found the bodies of Charles DeRosa, 49, and Linda M. Supino, 52.

In July, a 7-year-old girl who didn't know how to swim nearly drowned when she became submerged under water at Wenscott Reservoir in Governor Notte Park. Another bather saw her and pulled her to shore, where a lifeguard began resuscitation efforts. She didn't regain consciousness until emergency medical technicians placed her in an ambulance and began driving her to the hospital. The Red Cross awarded her with a certificate for free swimming lessons for the rest of her life.

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