

## CONSTRUCTION

# Historic Smith's Block gets updated for new owners

Bremik Construction's rehab of the Southwest Naito Parkway site requires a soft, steady touch



Dan Carter/DJC

The 24,000 square foot Smith's Block was built in 1872 by Oregon-architect W.W. Piper. Bremik Construction has been working since July 2007 on seismic renovations to the building's interior.

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The brick walls of the Smith's Block on Southwest Naito Parkway grunt and strain against the well-meaning Bremik Construction crew, who scrape patiently at its 136-year-old grout. In some places, the bricks crumble away while the masons work.

In 1872, the Smith's Block was a row of warehouses named for its owners William K. and Joseph S. Smith. It was built for \$50,000.

Today, the 24,000 square-foot block is undergoing a \$7.5 million facelift to prepare for its new owner, investment firm R.V. Kuhns & Associates, to occupy it.

But like any old-timer set in their ways, the block is resistant to change.

"The biggest challenge has just been trying to keep the building together," Craig Pierson, project manager on the renovation, said

Pierson and crew are currently doing seismic renovations on the building's interior, reappointing the brick and grinding out the old mortar. The un-reinforced masonry walls make this a slow and delicate process.

Pierson said they are looking at a June completion date with occupancy in July.

"This has been quite a challenge," Pierson said. "It's so much different than building a new building from the ground up. In some places you can walk up and pull the bricks right out of the wall."

Bremik plans to leave as much of the original brick exposed as possible so the building maintains its historical character. The ornate cast-iron front of the building, designed by Oregon architect W.W. Piper in Italianate style, will also be cleaned up and rebuilt so it looks original.

A giant skylight at the top of the building will be replaced, as well as 22 windows.

"Everything will be new, mechanical parts, plumbing, energy efficient windows; it will be a brand new building," Pierson said.

Bremik is not the first to clean up the Smith's Block. In 1955, the northern part of the building was leveled to create a parking lot. In the 1980s, it underwent a rehab which included the installation of an elevator core.

Originally a two-story building, the building's roof was raised and a second floor was added somewhere along the line. The third story floor is original and its age is apparent by the old two-by-four beams that run through it.

Some of the beams are cut from a single, gargantuan tree and run through the entire building, supporting its aged heft.

"There aren't trees big enough anymore to make beams like these," Pierson said.



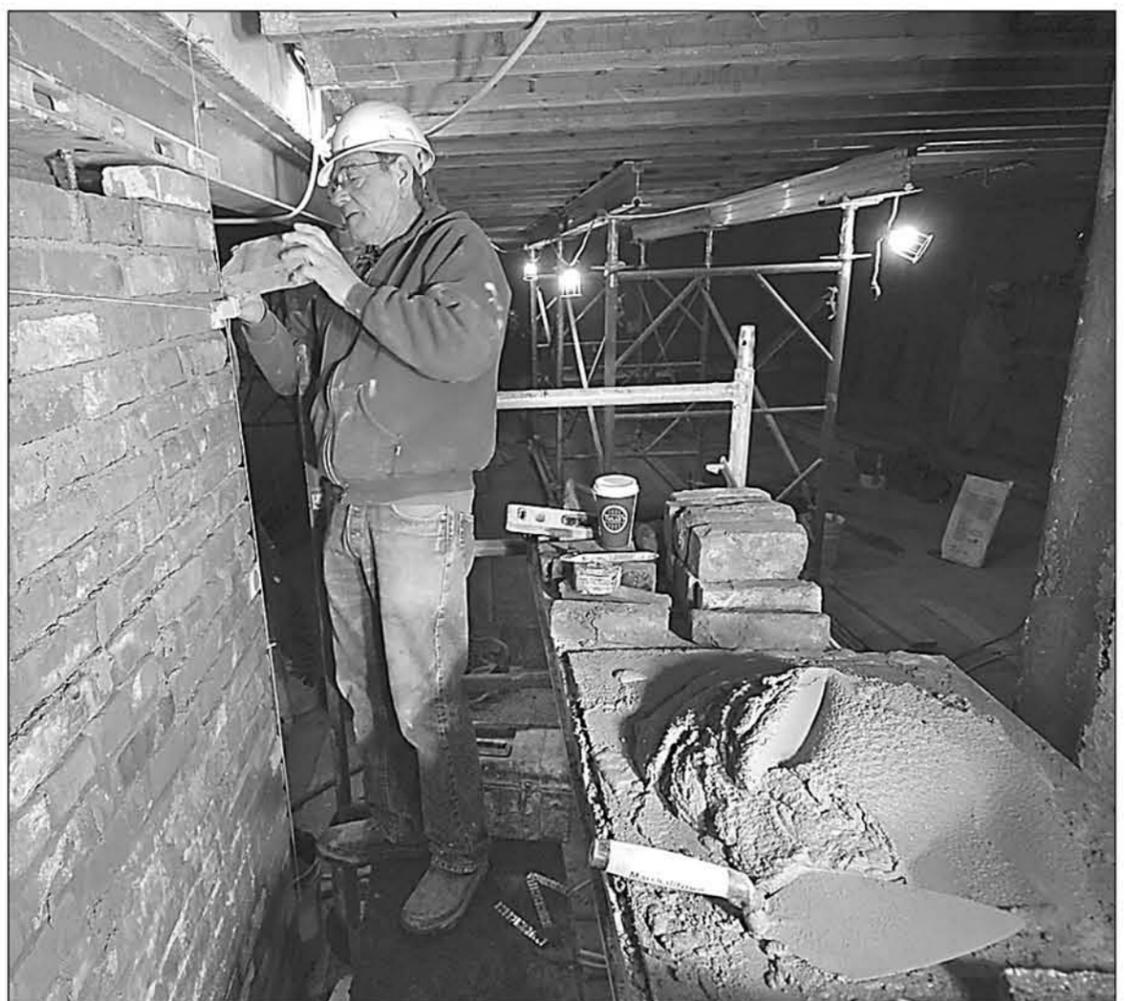
Dan Carter/DJC

The ornate front of the Smith's Block is one of the few remaining examples of cast-iron architecture along Portland's historic waterfront. The front was designed in Italianate style, which was popular during the late 19th century when the building was constructed.



Dan Carter/DJC

Reappointment of 130-year-old brick walls represents a large chunk of the renovation work being performed by Bremik. Project manager Craig Pierson hopes to leave as much of the original brick exposed as possible.



Dan Carter/DJC

Lindsay Moore, a mason with D&R Masonry, works patiently at replacing the aged mortar in the walls of the Smith's Block. In some places, the bricks are so loose that they can be pulled right out of the wall.