

Plainwell's personality shines thanks to two restorations

BY SHARON STURDEVANT
Special to the Gazette

Pub at 107 S. Main St. as part of a \$115,000 matching grant awarded by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

The city won the grant early this year after Cathy Green, who owns the structure that now houses Island City Tea and Spice, and Phil Anglin, who operates the pub in a structure that used to be two buildings, agreed to fund half the facade improvement work, said Plainwell downtown/economic development manager Emilie Schada said. Green contributed almost \$20,000, and Anglin paid about \$37,500.

"The goal of this public-private partnership was to maintain the historic integrity and enhance the appearance of the downtown area," Schada said. "That is a huge goal. The downtown area establishes the image and perception people have of your community."

Anglin admitted that the exterior of the building he bought almost 7.5 years ago wasn't attractive or inviting. "We actually started renovating the whole structure about 4.5 years ago," Anglin said. "The first things we did were internal, infrastructure projects like renovating the bathrooms and redoing the kitchen. We planned to do the facade work last."

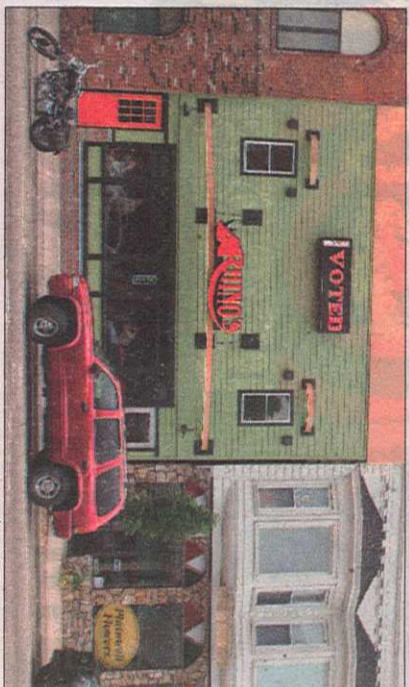
As part of the renovation, the pub's main door and large picture windows were flipped to improve traffic flow inside the structure, which is more than 100 years old and actually still bears a painted sign for the Star Drug Company. Green siding now hangs over the sign and behind a moving digital sign the pub owns and several decorative cooper pieces. Facade work at the pub was more of a "renovation" than a historic restoration project, Bates said. "It wouldn't have been impossible to restore the structure to its original condition," Bates said,



Island City and Spice, 111 North Main St., is the first dry goods store in Plainwell in 97 years.

"but it wouldn't have made any economic sense. Just restoring the building to its historic condition wouldn't have helped the pub operate any better." Meanwhile, work to replicate the terra cotta bricks and trim at 111 N. Main St. took a bit longer to complete. It started in May but wasn't finished until mid-July.

"We put nets up when we started tearing off the old facade to protect pedestrians from falling pieces," Bates said. "Then everyone thought we had left because we weren't at the site much."



Rhino's Hometown Pub, 107 South Main St. in Plainwell, is one of two local businesses to renovate its facade.

While off site, workers were busy molding some 170 terra cotta blocks and finding a dolls head from which to create four cherubs that look down from the second floor. "Masons used to find a unique way to mark their projects," Bates said. "I actually challenged our workers to do that with the cherubs but only project manager Jeff Braasch took on the challenge." Passersby who look carefully will see that one cherub on the building now sports glasses and a goatee. "It was absolutely cool to watch the process unfold," said Green, who sits on Plainwell's Downtown Development Authority. "And I think this project will spur some more improvements downtown."