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## EDITORIAL Brownsville, finally, may be on verge of a rebound

11 hrs ago



Exterior of the Observer-Reporter building in Washington.

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Brownsville, like a number of Mon Valley towns, is steeped in history and tradition, but mired in decay in recent times. For decades, the borough – bisected by Route 40 and across the river from Washington County – had been largely ignored, its downtown transforming into a real-life version of “The Land That Time Forgot.” Abandoned buildings and a distinct lack of pedestrians became two of its hallmarks.

And like some Valley towns that have initiated revitalization efforts, Brownsville is displaying signs of rebirth. A page 1 Sunday story by the *Observer-Reporter's* Scott Beveridge details the merits of an \$8 million construction project that was completed this month in a section of downtown known as The Neck. TREK Development Group of Pittsburgh conducted the overhaul over a two-year period.

TREK redid The Neck by restoring, demolishing and building anew, the centerpiece ultimately being a two-building, 24-unit apartment complex for senior citizens. The company repurposed a five-story structure that once housed a G.C. Murphy Co. retail store, then attached it to a four-story building it erected on the site where the Redevelopment Authority of Fayette County had razed two rundown structures.

Beveridge's photos of the complex and other restored buildings show a row of attractive structures in an area that, not long ago, was truly unattractive. The residential units are being marketed to seniors based on income. New mayor Ross Swords Jr. said there was a need for the complex, after building code violations forced residents out of a nearby apartment building.

Brownsville, established in 1785, started on a downward spiral a little after celebrating its bicentennial. A Pittsburgh area couple bought a number of downtown buildings in the 1990s, planning to refashion the area into a gambling destination with other attractions. That endeavor failed. The Fayette authority entered in 2008, and over time used eminent domain to assume ownership of 24 buildings, pledging to work with residents to save a number of them.

Although blighted properties remain, there are other signs a turnaround is occurring. A park will be going in across the street from where TREK did its handiwork. High school students designed a stage for the park, a \$307,000 structure paid for by state and national grants from the Jefferson Awards Foundation.

The Brownsville Area Revitalization Corp., a nonprofit, has been restoring other structures in the borough, including the Flatiron Building in The Neck. BARC also was responsible for bringing a pharmacy to that part of the town.

BARC's vice president, Herbert "Mitch" Mitchell, said his organization helped convince TREK to tackle this project three years ago by showing "someone is doing something" in the Fayette County borough. Others have acknowledged an upswing.

"We're starting to see some success here," said Andrew P. French, executive director of the Fayette authority.

"Slowly, people are interested in the properties," Swords said. "It's starting to bounce back."

There is hope Brownsville blight will be something other than an alliterative term and a fact. The recent bad times, at some point, may become part of the borough's otherwise distinguished history.

