

## Former News building comes down

By Chris Cassidy , Staff writer  
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SALEM - Downtown walkers on their lunch break stopped and stared. Passing drivers couldn't help slowing down and gazing out their side windows.

The heavy claw of a yellow excavator shredded the old Salem Evening News building yesterday to make way for downtown condominiums, apartments and shops.

Small crowds of curious onlookers gathered throughout the day to watch walls crumble, windows shatter to the pavement and clouds of dust float up from the rubble.

"It's like watching a car wreck," said Dennis Moustakis, owner of the Edgewater Cafe next door. "You can't keep your eyes off it."

Even the mayor stopped to watch the heavy excavator chomp away at the tired building.

"It's the most exciting thing I've seen all day," Mayor Kim Driscoll said. "I could have watched it all day long."

Tom Victory of Salem was on his lunch break, so he grabbed his camera and snapped photos.

"Wrecking is something I've always been enthralled with," Victory said. "This came down in a heartbeat. ... This place evokes a lot of memories. My mom and dad were subscribers to The Salem News since the 1960s. This is really a turning point, not an ending."

"It's like watching history, you know what I mean?" said Moustakis, who has photos of the building dating back to the 1920s.

A Passage to India co-owner Hugh Kerr did anything but romanticize his memories of the abandoned downtown landmark.

"It's like getting rid of an old wife," Kerr said.

Empty for the last few years, the old building attracted rodents and the homeless, who'd leave empty bottles and nips all over the sidewalk, he said. The Salem Evening News sold the building in 1995 but rented office space there until 2001, when the newspaper moved to its present headquarters at 32 Dunham Road in Beverly.

Crews are demolishing the building right up to the wall of Kerr's restaurant. But yesterday, a steady crowd of lunchgoers dined on chicken tikka and lamb kebab, oblivious to the falling planks of wood next to them.

"You'd hardly even notice it's happening," Kerr said.

Both the Edgewater Cafe and A Passage to India, two restaurants that operate out of a portion of the building, will remain open through the three-week-long demolition.

Somerville-based developer RCG, which bought the site in the summer for \$2.4 million, plans to build 31 residences and finish construction in 2009.

Finally, there are signs of new life at the blighted building at perhaps the city's busiest intersection. Downtown planners are hoping the site will soon do just what it did yesterday at lunchtime - attract people's attention.

"I'm dying for this corner to be alive again," Kerr said.

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