

City eyesore receives facelift

A 96-year-old Farmington landmark soon will undergo a facelift.

The old LaSalle winery on Grand River will be restored and converted into a facility for wholesale outlets and a theme restaurant, a plan that ultimately will draw new business and revenues to the Farmington area.

With this restoration, another of Farmington's deteriorating eyesores will be eliminated. The winery joins the old Medallion Pool building on Grand River and the New Era Potato Chip warehouse on Nine Mile in becoming transformed for different business purposes.

John White, of Stirling-White in Farmington, has purchased the building and its more than three acres from the New York-based parent company of LaSalle Wines & Champagnes, Inc.

White plans to move his manufacturing representative firm into the old structure, and lease the rest of its 94,000 square feet to other wholesalers.

He has been approached by three separate groups which want to convert part of the interior into a theme restaurant and cocktail lounge. One group even visualizes

using the 86 wine vats remaining in the structure as different areas for a dining room.

WHITE ALSO SAYS he has discussed lease agreements with several companies and presently has enough commitments to fill about 35,000 square feet on any of the structures three levels.

The Livonia resident hopes to retain the historic appearance of the building while giving the entire structure a complete facelift. He plans to redesign the interior and redress the exterior, a move that could cost him more than \$70,000.

The restaurant group who will lease a section of the building would provide more than \$500,000 to remodel the facility.

To detail the historical background of the old structure, White hopes a historic marker may someday be placed on the grounds to explain its significance in the development of the Farmington community.

The winery has stood vacant for more than six years. Back in the late '60s, LaSalle slowly pulled out of the Farmington area because it became too difficult to pro-

duce wine in this region.

LaSalle had to transport its grapes from western Michigan and the process became too expensive for the major wine producer.

The new owner has considered purchasing the winery for several years, but finances posed a problem.

"I first looked at the old place five years ago, but we just didn't have the money then," White explains. "Our company outgrew its present office long ago and we have been searching for a new facility for some time.

"I WAS LOOKING in other communities for an office when I just happened to make

the right call at the right time," he continues. "I just finished closing the deal on the winery Friday afternoon."

The winery has been for sale since it closed in 1970 and was considered by several buyers, but none made any formal commitment to purchase the old landmark.

While its future facelift pleases city officials, it will do much to provide new dimensions to the community. With the wholesalers and restaurant, it will bring increased revenues to the city.

City Manager Robert Deadman said Friday afternoon that a restaurant group is scheduled to come before the city council tonight to request a liquor license for the new dining and cocktail lounge.



The old abandoned LaSalle winery on Grand River will soon become the home for several wholesale firms and a theme restaurant as its new owner finalized the real estate transaction last week and made plans for remodeling the 96-year-old structure. (Staff photo)

