

# Irked neighbor: DevCo a reckless wrecker

The Home News / Walt Radomsky

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**NEW BRUNSWICK** — Demolition of the old J. Schwartz furniture store on Memorial Parkway began this week to make way for the redevelopment of the Hiram Market district. But owners of a business sharing a common wall with the store are considering legal action because of damage to their building they say occurred during the demolition.

Meyer and Edward Leder, owners of A. Leder Plumbing Supply, claim the damage to a common wall they shared with the Schwartz building was a deliberate attempt by the New Brunswick Development Corp. to decrease the value of their building. DevCo, the city's private, non-profit development corporation, plans to redevelop the deteriorated Hiram Market area, New Brunswick's commercial center during the 19th century, with the construction of upper-income condominiums. The plans have drawn criticism from some historic preservationists and others who believe existing buildings should be rehabilitated.

Several historic buildings in the area will be retained, including the King Block building, which will be

converted into apartments, and Poile Zedek synagogue.

DevCo offered the Leders \$100,000 for their three-story building in March 1985, an offer the Leders said they rejected as too low. They would not reveal how much they will seek for the building. DevCo acquired the Schwartz building, which had been vacant for several years, in June.

George Gussis, the Leders' attorney who has represented other businesses affected by revitalization, said he will send a structural engineer to the site once demolition is completed and, based on the engineer's report, will decide whether to file suit on behalf of his clients.

"We believe they may have made the building structurally unsound," Gussis said. "As far as I'm concerned, DevCo acted in reckless disregard of their property."

The Leders have also filed a report with city police claiming \$12,000 in equipment is missing from their offices. Access to the building was made possible because of the damage, they said in the police report.

A. Leder Plumbing first opened on Hiram Street in 1917 and has been at its current site since 1919, Edward Leder said. The business has been



Leder plumbing supply (building at right) and J. Schwartz furniture used to share wall.

closed since a fire damaged the store in 1981.

"We're not trying to be unfair or unreasonable," Edward Leder said. "That's our life savings in there."

DevCo President Paul Abdalla declined comment on the Leders'

charges.

"I haven't seen anything yet and I don't think it would be proper for me to comment on something I haven't seen," he said.

Abdalla also said there was no update on the redevelopment plan.

"It's part of the ongoing process," he said of the Schwartz demolition. "As we acquire the buildings, we demolish them."

John Hoffman, the attorney who made the \$100,000 offer to the Leders on behalf of DevCo, also said he was unaware of their charges.