

Royal Connaught renovation project launched

By Lisa Polewski, [CBC News](#)

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The Royal Connaught has faded from its former glory in recent years. (Lisa Polewski/CBC)

Steve Gazda says he remembers when the Royal Connaught was a jewel in the heart of downtown Hamilton, and he hopes a redevelopment project will make it glitter once again.

Back in the glory days of the Connaught, Gazda said he used to clean the front windows in the lobby of the magnificent hotel. But the elegant building on the edge of Gore Park has been empty for the past decade as its owners debated what to do with the property.

Now developers Ted Valeri of Valery Homes and partner Rudi Spallacci of Spallacci Group are gearing up to turn the historic building into the Residences of the Royal Connaught, and Gazda said he's eager to see what happens to the property.

Marking the first day of spring, Valeri and Spallacci put up the signs for the Connaught's renewal at the corner of Main Street and Catharine Street Wednesday morning. Valeri told CBC Hamilton he's excited to get started on the renovation of the monumental piece of Hamilton architecture.

"We're coming back and giving back to our community, and we've taken probably the nicest building and are giving it new life," Valeri said.

Restoring the past

Gazda said he likes to sit on the Connaught's front steps and envision the past. "I remember when it was, I think it was about 1979, and it was still up and running. I remember the foyer inside here. It was beautiful, red carpeted, and it had that circular stairway going up and everything. Beautiful."

Spallacci described what the pair envisions for the new lobby once it is renovated, a project they are aiming to have complete for fall of this year.

"You're going to walk through a revolving door, and it's going to take you to the past ... but restored," said Spallacci.

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—Rudi Spallacci, Spallacci Group

"So you're going to have this nice lobby, 24 foot ceilings, crystal chandeliers, a sweeping staircase, glass rails, and so on. You're going to have a coffee bar on the one side, nice smell of coffee and croissants — hopefully — baking ... that's the environment that you're going to have in that lobby."

Valeri and Spallacci said the feedback from citizens has been positive so far, with interest coming from Hamilton, Toronto, and even as far away as the United States.

Gazda, a longtime resident of Hamilton, said he hopes this project will lead to further renewal in Hamilton.

"It's a great idea because this is actually an eyesore," said Gazda, gesturing to the boarded-up windows and crumbling state of the Connaught as it currently stands. "To me it is, and to a lot of people that go by here. They look at the building and go, 'What happened?' But it's going to be nice once it's all restored."

Although renovating the Royal Connaught is a step in the right direction, Gazda added that there is still a great deal more work to be done to restore Hamilton's downtown.

"To me, it's like putting a band-aid on a gushing wound," Gazda said. "It's going to take a long time, but this city is going to pick up. It's going to be nice."

The condominium units, which Valeri said would start in the low \$200,000 range, should be available for sale beginning in the fall.