

Projects in the **New Year**

New year to bring school closings in Flint

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FLINT — Another year, another round of closings for the Flint School District.

Facing a multimillion-dollar deficit, the school board is expected by June to hammer out a plan to close several schools and discuss possible plans for renovating or building new schools. The plan was outlined in a report released recently on the

Closing in 2009

- The Flint School District is expected to announce multiple school closures by the end of the school year.
- A facilities committee recently released a report that says the district's current enrollment requires about 18 schools but the district has 35 buildings.

district's 35 facilities. School officials are expected

to solicit input this month from the public at a series of community forums, said Ira Rutherford, chairman of the facilities committee, at a recent board meeting. The district has room for more than 30,000 students but has fewer than 13,500 enrolled.

The list of school closures could be rolled out as early as March along with the 2009-10 school year's budget recommendations, Superintendent Linda Thompson has said. The school

board has the final say on which buildings will be shuttered.

"They're going to have to make some drastic changes," said Norm Bryant, committee member and former school board member. "They've got a rough task ahead of them."

Although not required to, school board members have said they will take the 42-page facilities report seriously. The committee spent months analyzing years of Flint schools' data and visit-

ing schools in other parts of the county for comparison.

Committee member Quincy Murphy, president of the Garfield-Bunche Community Service Group, said he hopes the school board develops a plan for the closed schools so they don't attract crime or become eyesores.

Bryant said he hopes the district bites the bullet and closes enough schools so more won't

► **School, A4**



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▲ James True of Port Huron seals windows on the fourth floor of the former Durant Hotel in downtown Flint Wednesday. The major renovation project is expected to be completed by the fall.

Durant Hotel finding new life in '09

Renovation 'erases' sign of decline in Flint

By Ron Fonger
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FLINT — The developer of the former Durant Hotel saw downtown boosters cheer the start of heavy construction there just a few months ago.

Just think how loud the praise will be by fall 2009, when the \$30-million renovation is expected to be complete and the Durant reopens — this time as apartments — for the first time in 35 years.

"The Durant is still on schedule for competition and for fall occupancy, largely targeting students at the University of Michigan-Flint," said Richard Karp, whose company is part owner of the property and project developer.

Purchased by the Genesee County Land Bank in 2005, the Durant Hotel was sold to a group that includes Lansing area developers Karp & Associates and Prater Development.

The project has been helped by the sale of county-backed bonds as well as



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◀ The Durant Hotel, a major downtown Flint landmark, has been closed for 35 years.

grants from the Charles Stewart Mott and Ford foundations.

Land Bank Chairman Daniel T. Kildee said this development means more than almost any other renovation or new building could.

"The Durant (redevelopment) erases the biggest sign of decline and failure in the city of Flint," Kildee said. "Erasing a negative is as big an impact as the (effect of the) new housing."

Opened as a hotel in 1920, the

Durant had been the subject of several failed redevelopment proposals in the past, leaving city officials and downtown supporters disappointed.

The new apartment building will be known as The Durant and will include 93 units ranging in price from \$440 to \$825 a month, officials have said.

Amenities are expected to include granite countertops, in-unit washer and dryer and stainless steel appliances.

Details: www.thedurant.com.

► **Repairs, A4**

Corunna Road, I-69 to undergo big repairs

By Ron Fonger
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GENESEE COUNTY — Spending is expected to be down on state and local road projects in 2009, but drivers still will run into work crews, including a complete three-month shutdown of Corunna Road in Flint Township.

The state Department of Transportation is expected to spend about 10 percent less in 2009 than it did in 2008, but will still oversee a massive, 13-mile rebuilding of I-69 in eastern Genesee and western Lapeer counties.

Spending on roads also is expected to decrease at the Genesee County Road Commission, although President-elect Barack Obama's public works spending plan could potentially change that.

The Road Commission recently sped up preliminary engineering on five projects, hoping to be ready for any federal funding available for roads.

► **Repairs, A4**

New businesses, restaurants to open downtown

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FLINT — The changing look and feel of downtown is expected to continue in 2009, with the scheduled opening of a \$20-million, mixed-use building and new places to eat for residents and workers.

The Rowe Professional Services Co. building on the west side of the 500 block of South Saginaw Street, which suffered a partial collapse in 2007 during construction, will house the engineering firm, loft apartments and commercial space.

"Having another 110 employees coming into our downtown area just again signals growth for downtown and signals progress," said Tim Herman, chief executive officer of the Genesee Regional Chamber of Commerce and president of Uptown Rein-

► **Downtown, A4**

Fireworks, family fun bring out the crowds at Fenton's Jubil'Eve

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FENTON — Joey Stinson isn't usually a fan of Fenton's nightlife.

But, New Year's Eve is different.

Stinson, 17, of Fenton, had plenty to do at the fourth annual Fenton Family Jubil'Eve on Wednesday night in downtown Fenton.

"It's fun to come out and hang-out with friends," he said.

"There's different activities at each section. There's no cars and no danger."

About 2,500 people were expected to descend on downtown

Fenton for entertainment and fun Wednesday evening. There were activities at seven different venues that included music, facepainting and games.

Stinson was volunteering with his youth group — Youth Missions of Fenton United Methodist Church — working concessions.

After that, he hit up the "instrument petting zoo," his favorite activity, which allowed people to try the different instruments set up throughout the room.

It was a great practical joke venue for Stinson, who plays the trumpet.

"I come up and act like I don't

know how to play it, and then I start playing great," he said.

The night kicked off with fireworks, then activities began to keep people busy until they welcomed 2009.

"We hope they come out because it's inexpensive entertainment," said event Chairman Bob Reynolds.

Entertainment included Elvis tribute artist Leo Days, Motown group The Saints, folk artists Mustard's Retreat, the classical Dort Honors String Quartet and Flint Symphony Orchestra brass and



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▲ Max Post (right) of Linden and the Rev. Dale Swihart of First Presbyterian Church hang the "Happy New Year" sign in preparation for Wednesday night's Fenton Family Jubil'Eve.

► **Year, A4**