



Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm tours downtown Flint's renovation effort, calls it 'cool'

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FLINT, Michigan -- Surrounded by brick walls, glass sliding doors and contemporary art in downtown's newest remodeled building, Kathi Horton told Gov. Jennifer Granholm that she remembered Granholm's words when Rowe Inc. broke ground here.

"You said, 'OK Flint, who's whose next?'" recalled Horton, president of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, as she showed off the foundation's brand new headquarters in a three-story building that includes loft apartments and space for a restaurant.

"You stood there and challenged this community and said there needs to be a next." Community members hoped to show Granholm during her downtown tour Thursday that they were stepping up to meet her nearly two-year-old challenge.

And the governor, who used the word "cool" at least once to describe what she saw, was impressed.

"You've got a great community that's decided to invest downtown," she said. "You've got people living down here, you've got offices, you've got retail. There are restaurants coming... . This is all cutting edge."

Granholm, whose stop was to show support for revitalizing urban communities in Michigan, got her first look at two titan downtown projects -- the new foundation building and soon-to-open Wade Trim building -- spearheaded by real estate development group Uptown Developments.

She surveyed the "before" pictures of the foundation building that was once the abandoned site of the former Dale's Foods for Health and Baker Drugs: Graffiti splattered the walls. Broken windows invited dirt. Birds had swooped in.

The governor lauded the \$2 million renovated building that preserved history -- such as by keeping its original 100 year-plus bricks -- but was trendy and stylish with skylights, iridescent borders and stained-glass art.

In the Wade Trim building, she checked out the new spacious quarters for the engineering firm and WNEM (Channel 5).

Then she walked upstairs to a maple-floored loft apartment where she peeked through an arched window overlooking a balcony and view of Saginaw Street.

"It's great. I'm moving in," she quipped, later adding "The synergy from all of this happening at the same time is going to be great for downtown."

Uptown Developments has invested about \$35 million in the downtown area.

"We're showing off all the progress Flint has made over the past three or four years.

We think we're close to a tipping point of bringing Flint back to a city that's a great place to live, work and enjoy," said Uptown's project manager Ridgway White, who led Granholm's tour.

"I think we're showing Flint is on the upswing. It has promise to be a bright spot in Genesee County and state of Michigan in coming years."

Phil Shaltz, one of the managing partners of Uptown Developments, said as the state invests in communities such as Flint, it's important for the governor to see results.

And highlighting the positives will help Flint shed its bad rap, he said.

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