

Fresh hope for Fresh Prince land deal

Don't write off the Society Hill condo-hotel project backed by entertainer **Will Smith**.

Smith, with the company Philadelphia Hotel Partners, paid \$3.2 million in March 2000 for the site at Front and Lombard Streets, the former NewMarket pavilion. As the hotel market softened in 2001, the project was halted, and it's now just a fenced lot.

The partners still have hope. They recently were granted a year's extension on the project's zoning permits; plans called for about 185 rooms and two dozen condos. Meanwhile, talk is building that they're considering a stronger condo presence — logical, given today's hot condo market. (The ongoing redevelopment of the nearby Old Original Bookbinder's restaurant, for example, includes 19 condos; nine have been bought, at \$650,000 to about \$1 million each, says Renaissance Properties' **Stanley Tarala**.)

The partners are "considering their options under its current approvals," says Smith attorney **Charles Naselsky**.

Living large

When **Ben Affleck** and **Jennifer Lopez** were here during last year's filming of *Jersey Girl*, they took over two adjoining apartments high above the Parkway at the Phoenix, at 16th and Arch Streets. Combined, the pad was among the largest rentals in Center City. Since they moved out, a CEO took over the smaller place (2,733 square feet, \$8,000 a month), and a TV celeb is about to take over the larger unit (3,752 square feet, \$18,750 a month). This makes room for another big, new, swank rental about to hit the market: the entire 11th floor of the Green Tree, at Fourth and Walnut Streets — a 5,795-square-footer with three bedrooms (each with private bath), wrap-around terrace, and drop-dead views — for \$12,500 a month.

Entertainment notes

Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! No, it's a location scout for a big-

budget action film starring **Jean-Claude Van Damme**. Assorted Center City buildings are being considered as a vantage point from which a chase scene would be shot by Hong Kong director **Ringo Lam**.

Camera toters from public TV's WYBE will be on Rittenhouse Square Tuesday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. They want people to tell one-minute stories about themselves for *Philadelphia Stories*, which premieres July 8.



Michael Klein
INQlings

Aussie director **Gregor Jordan** stopped here Wednesday to eat a cheesesteak. Between bites, he talked up his antimilitary film *Buffalo Soldiers*, which stars **Joaquin Phoenix**, **Ed Harris** and **Scott Glenn** and opens Aug. 8. As for Glenn, whose rich past includes *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Training Day*: He lived as a teen in the early 1950s in Bryn Athyn, Montgomery County. As for Phoenix, who was here in 2001 shooting *Signs* for **M. Night Shyamalan**: He will return here

soon to shoot Shyamalan's next feature, *The Woods*.

The circuit

It's a wrap for a different "woosy" Philly-shot film — *The Woodsman*. The **Kevin Bacon-Kyra Sedgwick** flick wrapped six weeks of work early Thursday. And with the couple's return to New York, it's a wrap for sightings around the Rittenhouse Hotel, a few blocks from where Bacon grew up. Passersby gawked but didn't annoy. The couple had a quiet dinner last week at the nearby Alma de Cuba.

Frankie Avalon and the crew from *Grease* packed the Spruce Street eatery Valanni Wednesday for the opening-night party. While others were eating, Avalon was meeting and greeting.

Before she died of melanoma in 2000, Comcast-Spectacor executive **Noreen O'Neill** founded the Foundation for Melanoma Research. Three years later, her group is a host of the first International Research Congress on Melanoma, a meeting

of docs and experts through Tuesday at the Wyndham Philadelphia. See info at www.melanoma.org.

Radio activity

Though nothing's official, smart money IDs the permanent midday duo at WIP-AM (610) as **Anthony Gargano** and **Steve Martorano**. Gargano had been solo since **Mike Missanelli** left for WMMR-FM (93.3). The durable Martorano, a frequent fill-in, formerly was at WWDB.

WBEB-FM (B101)'s **Chris & JJ** morning team is splitsville after nine years. The contract of JJ (**Joan Jones**) was not renewed, so **Chris McCoy** is solo till a new host is hired. Meanwhile, Jones does commercial voice-overs; the Web site is www.cheapneasy.net.

Supreme commission

On the first Monday in October in 2008, the Supreme Court will convene, and **George C. Skarmees** might be able to relax. Skarmees, of East Falls, heads Hillier Architects' Historic Preservation Studio, which last week began a five-year, \$122 million overhaul on the Supreme Court's circa-1938 building in Washington. Hillier and about two dozen other firms applied for the \$122 million job five years ago. "It's one of the most significant classical buildings of the first half of the 20th century," Skarmees says. "It could be the last major classical commission made in America. ... Our goal is very simple. When we're done, we want it to look exactly like **Cass Gilbert** designed it." Skarmees got early training in his native Greece. A quarter-century ago, he moved to the States for "one year" and ended up getting his doctorate from Penn. So this is an immigrant's story, too: "The United States gives the greatest opportunity to people who want to achieve certain things. I cannot think of another country where I'd want to spend my entire career."

Contact columnist Michael Klein at 215-854-8514 or mklein@phillynews.com.