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Buying Here: Braddock

By Gretchen McKay

Braddock has suffered a long, crumbling fall from grace since its heyday in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, when more than 20,000 people lived and shopped within its borders. Suburbanization and deindustrialization hit this Mon Valley community especially hard. Ninety percent of the town is now a landfill, and many of the buildings that remain are either abandoned or in severe decline.

Today Braddock counts just a little more than 2,000 residents, a third of whom live in poverty. But there are glimmers of hope.

The community's first five live-work spaces will be the latest breath of fresh air. Located where the former UPMC Braddock Hospital stood for more than 100 years, the studio spaces are being constructed by Trek Development Group, which last year completed a \$9.5 million, 24-unit townhouse development called The Overlook at the rear of the site.

The \$6.5 million project at 501 Braddock Ave. is part of a redevelopment package put in place by the Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County and the Mon Valley Initiative when the hospital was torn down in 2010.

Architect Rothschild Doyno Collaborative's edgy design has not yet been completed by Mistick Construction -- they're aiming for a

grand opening sometime around Thanksgiving -- but the forward-looking lofts are sure to appeal to artists looking for a one-of-a-kind live/work residence at affordable rates.

Set back from the street with well-lit, landscaped sidewalks, the units will feature polished concrete floors and 20-foot ceilings. Each will include between 761 to 935 square feet of live/work space with a small kitchen on the ground level, along with a sleeping loft/mezzanine measuring between 253 to 266 square feet. Large windows facing Braddock Avenue will provide ample natural light. Four commercial units are being built on the same side and a free,

secure parking lot will be in the rear.

The lofts -- matched by Pantone to the same earthy color palette as The Brew Gentlemen's building across the street -- adjoin a two-story commercial building with four retail spaces ranging in size from 890 to 1,500 square feet.

The live/work spaces, says Mayor John Fetterman, are perfect for any small start-up with an artistic bent that wants to be part of an authentic community-building movement. That would include an architect, a potter, an app or video-game designer or a jewelry designer.

"We're trying to build on the vibe growing here," he says.

