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## A village transformed by one woman's vision

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ANGELICA — In America, the sweep of "progress" and development remakes the landscapes of our cities, towns and rural areas like surf scouring a beach of sandcastles for the next wave of children.

Every day, farm fields are plowed under to make way for cul-de-sac communities, old Main Street storefronts are demolished and replaced by "box stores," and historic buildings and places remain under threat by our desire to stretch out and remold.

There are exceptions — little time capsules left untouched and under the radar of cookie-cutter development money.

Driving up Route 19 through Allegany County, we pass through villages, hamlets and crossroads that seem untouched by the footprint of sprawl. A quarter-century ago, the village of Angelica was a tired-looking community of decaying Main Street buildings and empty storefronts. But today it's quite a striking discovery along the two-lane roads of Allegany County.

"Angelica is a sweet little town," said former Rochester resident Susan Hall, who has lived in the village for six years and works at the Angelica Main Street Gallery in town. "It's definitely a step into the past."

Resurrection of a town does not happen overnight and is seldom accomplished by one person.

But if you ask around town about how it all happened, many will point to Long Island transplant Fleurette Pelletier.

"For a long time a lot of the buildings were empty. Business would go out and then they just sat," said Dottie Graham, who has run a bakery in town for 40 years and was born in the area. "It took some people from out of town to see the beauty here and build on it."

Fleurette is a grandmotherly woman with bright white hair, a welcoming smile and a distinctive New York City accent.

She first laid eyes on Angelica 23 years ago while looking for a place to purchase a bed and breakfast. Her husband, John, had just lost his job as a typesetter with a printing business that was closing its doors.

The couple found themselves looking for a less expensive place to live and start a business. The invitation to explore Angelica came from an Allegany pastor and an elder visiting Fleurette's Long Island church.

"I said, 'What's the name of the town' and he said, 'Angelica,' and I said, 'That has to be it,'" she recalls.

But the village she and her husband first saw did not look like a little piece of paradise. In fact, Fleurette described it as "depressed."

"My daughter came with me and I went back to Long Island and just was so excited about the beauty of this region and the lovely town," Fleurette said. "And my daughter kept (nudging) me, 'Did you really look at it, Mom.' And I did and I looked at how it could look now."

Fleurette and her husband purchased an old mansion in the village, restored it and opened the Angelica Inn Bed and Breakfast, and then they bought another Main Street building that once housed an auto parts store and created the Heritage Coffee House and Heritage Antiques next door. The couple sold the bed and breakfast and, with son Eric, a New York City architect, are now developing the former high school/middle school/elementary school into an inn, conference and cultural center.

What happened in Angelica is the kind of event economic development directors would love to see in their town.

Her investment in Angelica attracted other outside investors who opened antique shops, galleries and other businesses.

The new businesses, in turn, brought in tourists.

"I felt there was so much potential in the community and loved and respected the fact that they didn't take buildings down," Fleurette said. "As you start to develop, other people grasp the vision. You can't make a vision all alone."

So we walk out the doors of the coffeehouse and on to the wide sidewalk of Main Street.

The village is a busy little place.

The shops are open, buildings are under renovation and people are walking up and down the street.

"I think Fleurette Pelletier had a lot to do with this," says Hall, sitting on a bench in front of the gallery. "She is an amazing lady and she just keeps on going."

Fleurette steps outside, looks around and says this is what she saw in her mind's eye when she looked at Angelica for the first time.

"It's a gem," she says. "It's almost a finished product and you are seeing what I saw in the beginning."

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