Doors open to Rochester Academy building

By Mike Murphy

The Daily Record

Posted: 11:36 pm Sun, September 8, 2013

City, state and federal officials joined developer George Traikos on Sept. 5 for a ribbon-cutting ceremony marking the opening of the Rochester Academy Building on Friday.

At various times in its lengthy history, the Rochester Academy Building has served as a high school, office space and, for a fleeting time fairly recently, a potential site for a Monroe County family courthouse.

More than seven years ago — before the real estate bubble burst — developer George Traikos learned the four-story building, vacant for several years and showing its age, was available, at the price of the South Florida one-bedroom condo where he was living at the time.
Majestic. Beautiful. Historic. All were used to describe the structure, but other words may have been more appropriate, at least at the time.

“After coming to Rochester for the first time in my life to see the building, it became clear why they were asking so little,” Traikos said. “It was in pretty rough shape. It’s a beautiful building, but it was in trouble.”

Traikos and city and county officials hope that trouble is in the past.

Visitors gathered Friday for a ribbon-cutting ceremony and tours of the 36,500-square-foot building at 13 S. Fitzhugh St., which was built in 1873 and which Traikos bought in 2007. The $7 million project includes state and city loans as well as help from the county, state and federal governments in tax breaks and grants.

The ambitious project had an ambitious goal — to make the “most amazing” residential spaces in Rochester, Traikos said.

“We were determined to raise the bar for upscale city living,” Traikos said.

The Pioneer School predated the Rochester Academy Building, which was built in 1873.

The main level includes 6,000 square feet of commercial space. About 10,000 square feet of space will be devoted to food and drink establishments. A yogurt store is scheduled to open this fall and a coffeehouse may join it by the end of the year.

A cardiologist already has locked down one of the 21, one- to three-bedroom lofts, which are marketed to young professionals and empty nesters. Rents range from $1,300 to $1,500 for the one-bedroom units to $1,640 to $2,450 a month for the two-bedroom units.
The building also includes fitness area, storage, on-site parking and high efficiency washers and driers, among other features. An outdoor deck and seating area was added, near the sign describing the Academy’s history.

The building, designed by Rochester architect Andrew Jackson Warner and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was in rough shape, said Mayor Thomas S. Richards. He and others said they appreciate the perseverance in rehabbing the structure, which housed Rochester’s first public high school, a municipal court, Board of Education headquarters and the Edward’s restaurant.

As tough as the work was, the Academy building remains an asset to Rochester, Richards said.

“In some sense, the whole history of Rochester is written in this building,” Richards said.

The challenge in redoing the building proved worthwhile, because of a stable employment picture, even during the lean economic times and the uncertain futures faced by Eastman Kodak Co., Bausch + Lomb and Xerox Corp., Traikos said.

Also, the commitment to downtown redevelopment expressed in words and action by city, county and state government leaders also made the Academy a challenge worth taking on, he said.

“We came to believe in Rochester’s potential,” Traikos said.