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# Architects finding a purpose for repurposing properties

BY JOSHUA BURD

Some New Jersey industrial owners may be upgrading their properties to lure tenants, but others are opting for larger transformations and adaptive reuses.

**Matthew Jarmel**, principal at **Jarmel Kizel Architects & Engineers Inc.**, said the state's surplus of unused industrial real estate has provided fertile ground for conversion projects that offer work for design and con-

struction firms. He estimated that 20 percent of his firm's fees this year have been for adaptive reuse designs of industrial buildings.

"We try to do a little bit of everything," said Jarmel, whose company is based in Livingston. "But given the climate that's out there, adaptive reuse is an important part of our practice right now."

The firm's recent projects include a new furniture store, in East Brunswick, that was

once a 25,000-square-foot industrial building for a telephone company, Jarmel said. The work included designing a new building façade and windows, along with gutting and rebuilding the interior.

"It was right up on Route 18, and it was just screaming that it wanted to be a retail center, so we renovated it, had the use changed and made substantial renovations," he said.

In Wayne, **Hollister Construction**

**Services** has been converting a vacant industrial building to a facility that includes a showroom for auto parts, 15,000 square feet of office space and a 105,000-square-foot warehouse. While the building has retained a distribution function, **Kieran Flanagan**, president of the firm's New Jersey office, said clients increasingly are looking to add office and display space to their storage locations.

"We're seeing it be a little more common, where people want to go into these warehouses and distribution centers and use it for something a little bit different," Flanagan said, noting that the firm is now completing exterior work for the project.

Hollister, based in Hasbrouck Heights, also is converting and expanding a former paper warehouse, in Newark, to build the new **Damascus Bakery Inc.** production center. Kieran said the 117,000-square-foot project, on McClellan Avenue, calls for renovating existing office space and installing a baking facility, but also adding a freezer area and refrigerated loading dock for distribution.

Meanwhile, Jarmel Kizel's growing portfolio of health and wellness projects also includes industrial buildings that are being repurposed. The firm has designed such projects in Maywood, for Hackensack University Medical Center, and Plainsboro, for University Medical Center at Princeton. Jarmel said the former assignment called for converting

a 95,000-square-foot window manufacturing facility, which required lifting the roof, adding a second floor and "fitting it up with 30,000 square feet of hospital functions."

Jarmel said the planning and approval process for adaptive reuse projects can be easier than that of new construction, as they are good ways to fix assets that are "stuck or broken." But they can also offer design challenges to architects.

"Sometimes it's more difficult to renovate a building for adaptive reuse than to just design from scratch," Jarmel said. "It's more rigid, whereas when you're drawing something from scratch, you can put the lines wherever you want."

E-mail to: [jburd@njbiz.com](mailto:jburd@njbiz.com)

On Twitter: @JoshBurdNJ

**Matthew Jarmel**, principal of **Jarmel Kizel Architects & Engineers**, says the planning and approval process for reuse projects can be easier than new construction.

