

Condominiums to provide scholarly address

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Developers plan to retain details of former school

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NEW BRITAIN — If you're looking for an address that combines a sense of history and a feeling of, well, scholarly prestige, Hillside Place could be for you.

Picture coming home to an apartment where the front door is a 9-foot-tall slab of oak with lettering that says: Private. Board of education and superintendent of schools.

Aárrr! *That's power!*

Couple that kind of authenticity with 12-foot ceilings, Manhattan-white walls and all the conveniences. On the outside, dress it in Victorian Gothic brickwork, and perch it on a hill overlooking the city.

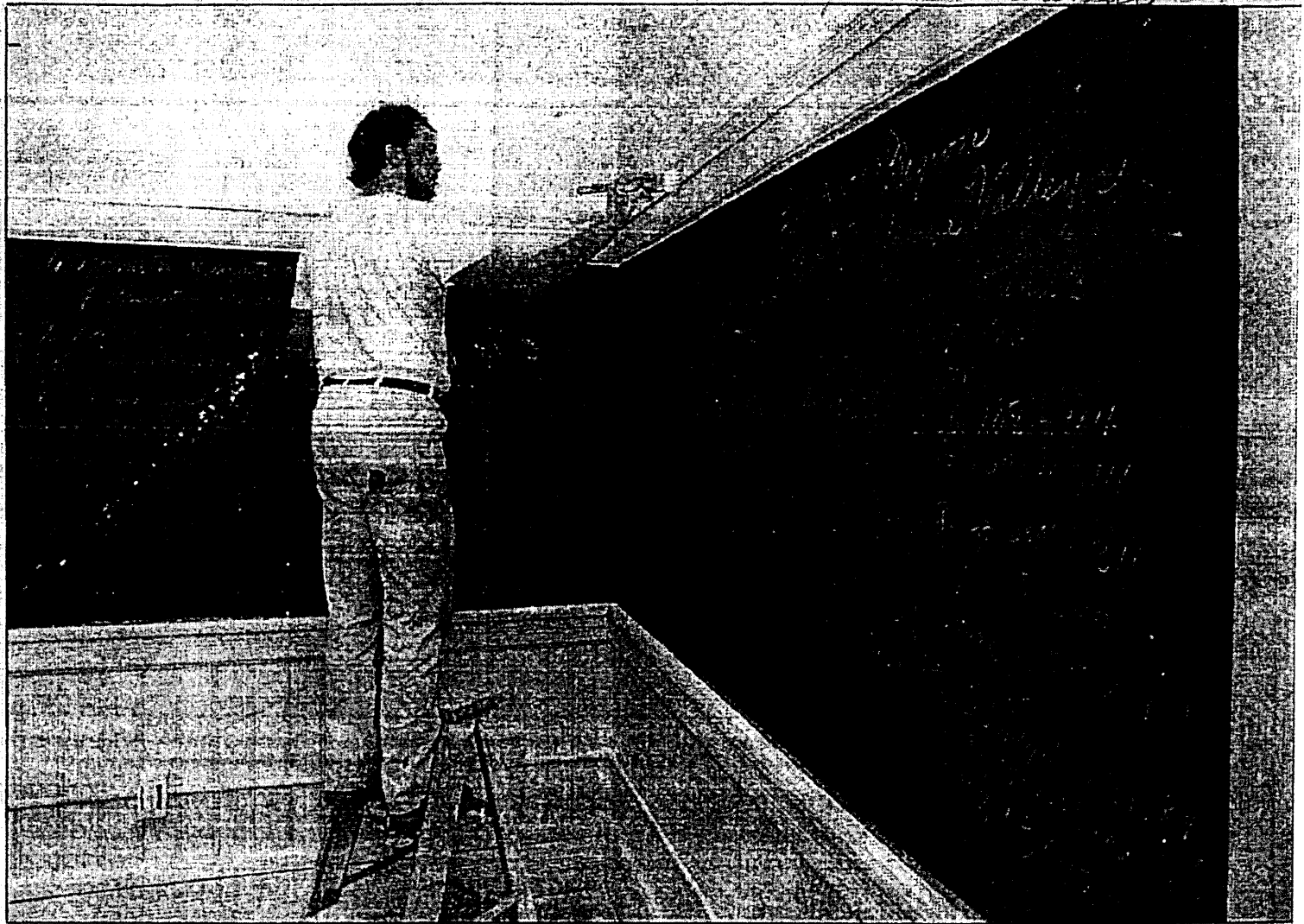
"Isn't it beautiful? It's really exciting," said Marilyn Russo, an agent with ERA Phanco Realty, as she gave a tour last week.

Of course, most doors for the 30 condominiums being completed at 27 Hillside Place don't bear such exclusive lettering. But many other details of the building's previous life have been retained.

Built in 1882 as the State Normal School, it was the first teachers' college in Connecticut. In 1922, it became the headquarters for the New Britain public schools.

Two years ago, the building's association with public service ended. The school administration, having decided renovations would cost too much, moved into a new office condominium at Liberty Square. The former school, beautiful but aging, was sold to a limited partnership organized by a Massachusetts development firm, Crowninshield Corp.

Now workers are finishing the last details of renovations, and the first new owners should be ready to move in by January, said Diane Arute, one of the project's developers.



Tony Dugal / Special to The Courant

■ Painting contractor Doug Robinson applies oil-based primer to trim work above blackboards at one of 30 condominiums being de-

veloped at Hillside Place. The site was once a school, and the blackboards, which still show lessons, will be part of a living room.

Sales have been slow. After a month of marketing, only two units had been sold as of Wednesday. But Arute and Russo said that despite the poor economy and the housing slump, they are confident.

"We have a different product,"

Arute said. "It's not a new building."

One potential disadvantage in marketing Hillside Place, as the project is called, is the Arch Street neighborhood only a block or two away. But Arute says she hopes a task force appointed by the city will

make progress in cleaning up crime, dilapidated buildings and other Arch Street problems.

The condominiums range in price from \$90,000 to \$195,000; the average is \$155,000, Russo said. The developers are marketing the one- to

three-bedroom units for professionals.

"This building is attracting a lot of people who for some reason want to need to stay in New Britain, also people who love historical buildings," Russo said.