



PRESS RELEASE

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Headline: **A Landmark Brought Back from the Brink**
Subhead: A Painstaking Restoration Breathes new Life into Alton Mill

Skeletons of stone mills line the riverbanks of southern Ontario and stare through empty windows at an uncertain future. A few have been saved as museums and other tourist attractions. Now a grand old mill is opening the second phase of its rehabilitation on the banks of Shaw's Creek in the Village of Alton, southwest of Orangeville Ontario with plans to be a vital part of the rejuvenation of the local economy.

Alton is a village in the town of Caledon and Alton Mill was built in 1881 to process wool into fleece lined long underwear that was sold across Canada. Its machinery was powered by Shaw's Creek and the strength of the dam and weir is credited with saving lives in the devastating flood of 1889. From 1935 to 1982, the Western Rubber Company occupied the mill, producing beach balls and punch balls for Shell and other gas stations, balloons for Disney, as well as surgeon's gloves, prophylactics during World War Two and flexible rubber ear cones to protect the hearing of Canadian and British artillerymen.

For nearly twenty years, Alton Mill and its outbuildings sat empty, slowly sagging back to the ground as rain leaked through the roof, timbers rotted, and mortar crumbled. The Seaton Group purchased the vacant buildings as part of a comprehensive development planned for the village, stopped by the economic downturn of the times. A woodworker, looking for an interesting place to set up shop, was the spark that began the process of bringing Alton Mill back. He resurrected part of the building in return for rent and, while he has moved on, the renovation now houses studios and galleries for several artists.

The rebuilding of the rest of the mill is a painstaking process and Seaton Group has invested \$5 million in the task with assistance from the federal and provincial governments through R.E.D. (Rural Economic Development) and C.H.P.I.F. (Commercial Heritage Properties Incentive Fund). They have brought in expert help. The architect for the project is Catherine Nasmith, President of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. She was instrumental in obtaining designation as a heritage structure by the Town of Caledon and getting Alton Mill placed on the Canadian Registry of Historical Places.

J.D. Strachan of King City is construction manager. Strachan has worked on the restoration of many Ontario historical structures including Fort York, Osgoode Hall,

University of Toronto Buildings and Queen's Park. J. D. Strachan vice president Don Hutchinson says "Nothing in this reconstruction shocked me. We were familiar with everything that came up and knew what to do about it but there was three times as much structural restoration as we first thought."

Some of the undertakings seem monumental. Sections of the two-foot-thick walls in the two-storey building had deteriorated to the point that the construction team had to chisel out the mortar between each stone to a depth of five inches – inside and out – and repoint with new mortar. To fill voids where the mortar had washed away from the centre of the walls, they drilled a checkerboard of holes and injected new grout. They lowered the basement floor up to eighteen inches through bedrock; replaced tottering posts with laminated fir; made the walls and lower windows strong enough to withstand the wall of water from another "100 year" flood, and now Phase Two at the Alton Mill is set to re-open.

When the ribbon is cut during the opening ceremonies on September 27, 2008, guests will be able to appreciate the extraordinary combination of old fashioned workmanship and modern design. Interior walls are set apart from the laminated posts so as not to hide the wood and antique hardware. Windows in the interior walls and open space or glass above them let natural light shine right to the centre of the space. New hardwood floors look like the might have been built more than a century ago and a modern lift answers today's need for accessibility. In the Turbine Room, heritage power equipment will recall antique technology. Under the floor, the millrace will still run, visible through glass lenses. Looking up in the stairwell, visitors will see a wooden water tower – an extinguisher system built after a fire destroyed the mill's third floor in 1908.

The Alton Mill space created by this restoration will be available for galleries, studios, offices and other space for creative pursuits, ranging in size from 290 to 1150 square feet with rents from \$500 to \$1800. Half of these suites will overlook the waters of Shaw's Creek and the waterfall over the dam.

"For more than 100 years, Alton Mill was not just a building," said Jeremy Grant, vice president of planning and development for the Seaton Group. "It has provided a livelihood for hundreds of people who worked there and lived in the community." Tenants in the Alton Mill will buy bread and pies at the bakery across the street, get gas in the local station, milk at the corner store and help attract visitors back to this historical village.

The official opening of Alton Mill takes place Saturday September 27, 2008. An open house begins at 10:00 a.m. for tours of the building and studios, with a reception at 5:00 p.m. and opening ceremonies at 6:00 p.m. Alton Mill is at 1402 Queen Street in Alton, Ontario.

For leasing information interviews or to request photographs for publication please contact Margi Taylor Self at 519-940-0935.