

Historic building renovation tax credit could restore many of the valley's vintage homes

And Ken Betz will be waiting there for them!

This summer Governor David Paterson signed legislation that will increase the income tax credit for the renovation of historic buildings from six percent to a whopping 20 percent, beginning in January, 2010. Moreover, the cap on tax credits "per project" has also been expanded for qualifying participants. And unlike a lot of the other state-run programs throughout the country meant to get people spending again, the historic renovation tax credit is not short term; it will be ongoing at its new rate for the next five years.

All of this is excellent news for Ken Betz, owner of AMHS (ARCHITECTURAL MOULDINGS HARDWOODS & SUPPLIES). Ken's store on Factory Street in Montgomery sells domestic and international hardwoods. Restoration enthusiasts, hobbyists and wood turners throughout the Hudson Valley and beyond know that they can go to him for their wood supply. In fact, AMHS is something of a gathering place for people who are passionate about wood. But Ken himself is more than just another wood hound. He is one of the premier historic restoration artists in the country.

In Hudson Valley renovation circles, Ken is known as the carpenter who saved the famed Crawford House, headquarters of the Newburgh Historical Society, from having to choose between historical authenticity and structural stability. Like some kind of hero in a fairy tale, Ken

came in after a succession of other restoration professionals had already surveyed the problem—rotting bases beneath each



of the building's four 24-foot high, neoclassically-designed columns—and failed to come up with any solution other than eliminating the columns in order to get to the bases beneath them. Then new columns would have to be built to replicate their historic forebears. Not only would the expense of producing historically accurate columns be astronomical, but from an aesthetic point of view, it would be a downright desecration—especially since the columns themselves remained in perfect condition. Ken vowed to save the day (and save the columns), and he did. He actually concocted a set of special tools that would hold the columns, which date back to 1830, away from their bases while he installed the replication bases to go beneath them.

The Crawford House restoration was extraordinary, but it is not Ken's only claim to woodworking fame. He has worked on several historical building sites in the historical section of Newburg, as

well as in other locations. Recently he saved the historical integrity of a house on the same street as the Crawford House,

but even older. The Webber house, which is a private residence, was built in the late 1700s. So much restoration work needed to be done on it that Ken and his team had to progress in phases. (See www.ahms.biz for details.) He is also known far and wide for his historic moulding renovation and replication and his cabinet-making artistry generally.

Now with the tax credit about to be extended to 20 percent, Ken is anticipating more of the kind of challenging work that he loves than ever, on projects both large and small. Many people purchase historical residences for their beauty—but then realize they are not quite big enough to meet their practical demands. A 20 percent tax credit may well push those on the fence, about building extensions that maintain the character of the original structure, over into Ken's yard.

And surely the tax credit will appeal to people with

smaller projects in mind. If one lives in a historic residence in a qualifying area, why replace a rotting porch with a pressure-treated deck when you can spend a few more dollars and save the historic integrity of the porch by reinforcing what can be preserved and carefully replicating what can't? Why purchase an assembly-line door, for example, when one can preserve the hardware and old blown-glass pane from an historic door and use them to build a replication for only a few more dollars?

The tax credit offers this kind of an option. Not only is this good news for Ken and other restoration specialists, but it is also really good for all the many New York communities that are home to historic buildings. In these times when we seem always to be rushing toward the future, the historic building renovation tax credit provides a good reason to slow down and consider the past.