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Ricardo Thomas / The Detroit News

**Daniel W. Ross, left, is project manager of the Lithuanian Hall work and Timothy S. Thorland is director of Southwest Non Profit Housing.**

## West Vernor revival in works

Nonprofit secures funds to renovate Lithuanian Hall in southwest Detroit.

By Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News

**DETROIT** -- Southwest Non Profit Housing Corp. is in the process of redeveloping properties at both ends of West Vernor Highway in hopes the business strip will thrive again.

The housing corporation is part of Southwest Solutions, an organization comprised of nonprofits in southwest Detroit. Officials said their latest project could be a big draw for neighborhood businesses and community groups.

That is because Southwest Non Profit Housing Corp. has secured funding for a \$2.2 million renovation of the Lithuanian Hall near West Grand Boulevard and West Vernor.

"This is a smaller scale project for us, but it is harder to get funding," said corporation executive director Timothy Thorland as he stood in the second floor ballroom of the building.

"Southwest Detroit is a fun place to live and work. It is the only area (in the city) growing in population."

Southwest Non Profit has built more than \$45 million in housing in the area since 1997.

Thorland said the hall could house a coffee shop, dry cleaning business

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### Rebuilding a community

Southwest Non Profit Housing Corp. can be reached at (313) 841-3727 or visit its Web site at [www.swsol.org](http://www.swsol.org).

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and a restaurant. A community theater group or dance studio could take over the second floor because it has ample room and a stage.

No one has signed lease, but Thorland said his organization will move its offices to the second floor until tenants can be found for that floor and the rest of the building.

On the other end of West Vernor, the housing corporation has built numerous units near Lawndale and Cabot.

Thorland said he would like to renovate properties between the two ends until there are a string of spruced up properties that make the community proud.

A stipulation he makes in awarding contracts is only hiring companies and workers from the city, especially southwest Detroit.

"We are not here to take away projects from for-development companies," Thorland said. "We are looking to do projects they would not do."

Daniel Ross, project manager for the Pontiac-based O'Brien Construction Co., which is renovating Lithuanian Hall, said he likes working with Thorland.

"This is the type of work we have a passion for," Ross said. "Rehabilitating buildings are much more challenging than building new ones."

The Lithuanian Hall was built in the 1920s and used materials and construction methods that are not employed today. It has sat vacant for more than 10 years.

"Today, you are not going to build buildings like in the 1920s," Ross said. "It is cost prohibitive."

Thorland would like to use the project -- financed with tax credits, loans and grants -- to showcase what his nonprofit can do.

While it focuses its work in southwest Detroit, it performs consulting work across Metro Detroit.

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