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STRATFORD

Coal-storage facility falls to wrecking ball





Brian A. Pounds / Hearst Connecticut Media

Demolition begins on the old Mercer Coal towers on Stratford Avenue in Stratford on Wednesday. Demolition is scheduled to take at least a week.

Development eyed for abandoned landmark

By John Burgeson

STRATFORD — At the intersection of Landmark and Eyesore sits the Mercer Towers, the huge coal-storage facility on Stratford Avenue that for generations meant there would be warm homes and hot water in the coming winter.

On Wednesday, the wrecking ball



» **VIDEO:** To see footage of the demolition, go to:

<http://bit.ly/1Ze6Sbz>

took its first swings at the outdated, abandoned concrete silos, and town officials say once they're hauled away, the site will be a perfect place for a development.

"This is a gateway to Stratford," said Mayor John Harkins at an impromptu news conference staged across the street, under the watchful stares of the angels in St. Michael's

Cemetery. "It wasn't easy to get to this point — it took \$700,000 in grants to clean this property up. There were eight underground storage tanks that had to be pulled out."

The mayor said too little has been done to improve the stretch of Stratford Avenue that runs along the cemetery, but that's finally changing.

"Just down the street is Two Roads Brewery, where we'll soon have a new roundabout," Harkins said.

"The important thing is to clean up

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these properties and to put them back on the tax rolls. People on the Metro-North trains look at this site every day, and it's not pretty."

Town officials say the parcel will be easier to sell to a developer once it's cleared. The 2350 Stratford Ave. lot, about 1 acre, was previously owned by C.J. Mercer and Sons Inc., which operated a bulk-storage coal and petroleum distribution facility there from 1929 to 1979. The town took ownership of the property in 2011



Property owner

Michael Kuen, vice president of Standard Demolition Services in Trumbull, said it will take about two weeks for the steel-reinforced towers to come down and to cart the mess away.

"It's a sensitive job — you have the Metro-North tracks on one side and Stratford Avenue on the other," he said. "With something this old, it will take time to see how it will react to our machines."

The towers seemed to put up a fight when the wrecking ball took its first swipes. The blows literally bounced off.

But then the demolition shears were called into service and began to nibble away at the reinforced concrete.

The towers hadn't seen a coal delivery in decades; most homes had switched to either oil or gas by the mid-1950s.

One could still make out the ghostly, sun-faded "MERCER" name painted on the six towers, one letter for each.

Not everyone was happy to see the coal towers demolished.

Sarah Vena Masso, 85, said she worked for Mercer Fuel from 1964 to 1981, and her childhood home on Hollister Avenue in Bridgeport was heated by coal. Today, she lives a few blocks away, on Hollister Street in Stratford.

"The Mercers — they were the nicest people you could want — company picnics in the summer and Christmas parties. I lived around the corner and they would let me leave early to pick up my sick children."

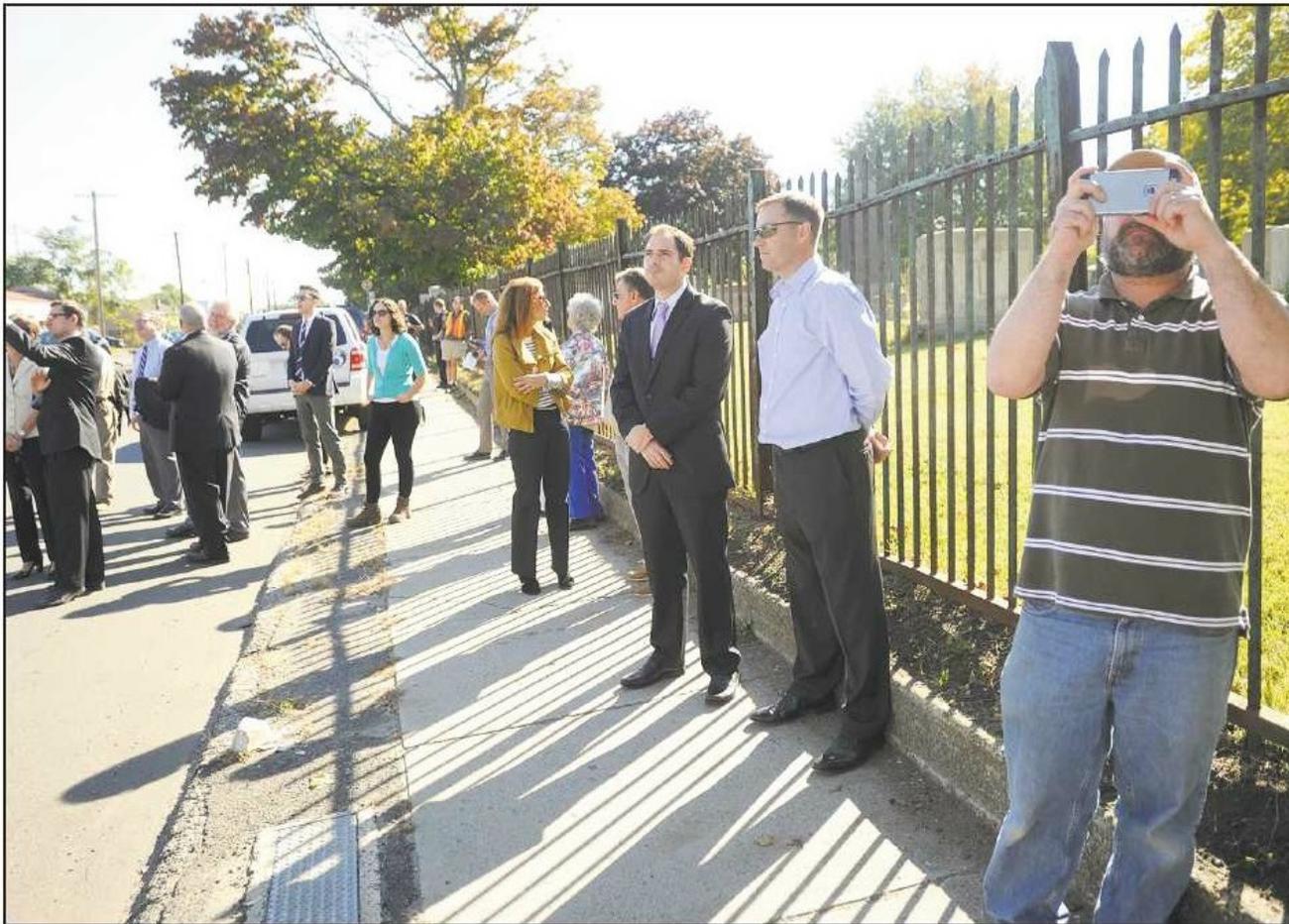
As for coal heat, she said she's amazed that her mom could bake a cake in a coal-fired range.

"Today, you just turn the knob to the exact temperature you want — that's not what it was like with a coal stove," she said holding up a lump of anthracite coal she salvaged from her girlhood days.



Brian A. Pounds / Hearst Connecticut Media

Demolition begins one chunk at a time on the old Mercer Coal towers on Stratford Avenue in Stratford on Wednesday.



Onlookers watch as demolition begins on the old Mercer Coal towers on Stratford Avenue in Stratford on Wednesday. Demolition is scheduled to take at least a week.