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ED HILLE / Staff Photographer

Damaged windows on the west and south sides of the tower of the historic RCA-Victor Lofts building in Camden.

Fixing a hole in a landmark

Work about to start at Victor Lofts.

Nipper has lost his head but not his patience.

In a beautiful but broken set of stained-glass windows high above the heart of Camden, parts of the vintage RCA-Victor mascot still await His Master's Voice.

Six large sections of stained glass have been blown inside the Victor Lofts tower in recent years, leaving three Nippers without their iconically cocked heads.

In one window, poor Nipper's body is also gone. At least the curious canine still possesses total terrier-ness on the tower's east side.

The deterioration of what's not only a regional landmark but a symbol of Camden's perpetually on-the-horizon renaissance dismays history buffs, downtown workers, and this columnist.

"An embarrassment," says Fred Barnum, author of the 1991 book *His Master's Voice in America*, a history of RCA-Victor and related companies.

"We've been calling and call-

ing" the building's management, adds Ron McHugh, a Pine Hill resident who has an extensive collection of company memorabilia.

Now it looks as if Nipper's long wait is almost over.

Carl Dranoff, whose company transformed the onetime "Victrola" plant into the snazzy, 341-unit complex, expects a \$75,000-plus restoration of the windows to begin soon.

"We have been at this for many, many, many, many months," Dranoff says, perhaps mindful of complaints about the marred top of his tower.

"We had to discover what the problem was," he explains. "Then we had to find someone qualified to fix it. These are all separate, handmade [stained-glass] parts."

Gartner Stained Glass Studios of Abington will do the honors. "The stained-glass artist has already taken [samples] of the remaining windows and is preparing to com-

See NIPPER on B13



Kevin Riordan

The Jersey Side

Commentary By Kevin Riordan

Working for closure at a Camden landmark

NIPPER from B9 mence the work," says project manager Michael Asnes.

He expects that replacement panels will be fabricated within the next two months and that repairs will be finished by the end of the year.

It's not a simple task. The circular windows are 15 feet in diameter and stand 12 stories above Market Street.

The original windows from 1916 were removed in the 1970s. They were re-created and reinstalled in the 1980s, and again in 1998.

"We thought the windows would be up there for 20 or 30 years," says Dranoff, who bought the building in 2002.

The \$75 million transformation of what had been RCA Building 17 into The Victor appears to be moving ahead. A 10-story former RCA building on Cooper Street near Second Street has been gutted, and

"Water, wind, and pigeons have weakened the internal frames which hold the panels in place," Asnes says.

"The repair work will include replicating and replacing the missing panels, as well as installing a reinforcing bar system on the interior of the windows."

The prospect of Nipper being put back together heartens Sandy Levins, president of the Camden County Historical Society. The society's museum has one of the original windows.

"It's terrific news," says Levins, calling Nipper "a symbol of Camden's world fame as the city that pioneered the recorded music industry."

The repairs come as Dranoff's long-stalled Radio Lofts condominium project appears to be moving ahead. A 10-story former RCA building on Cooper Street near Second Street has been gutted, and

"by the spring of 2011 it should be ready for the next phase" of construction, Dranoff says.

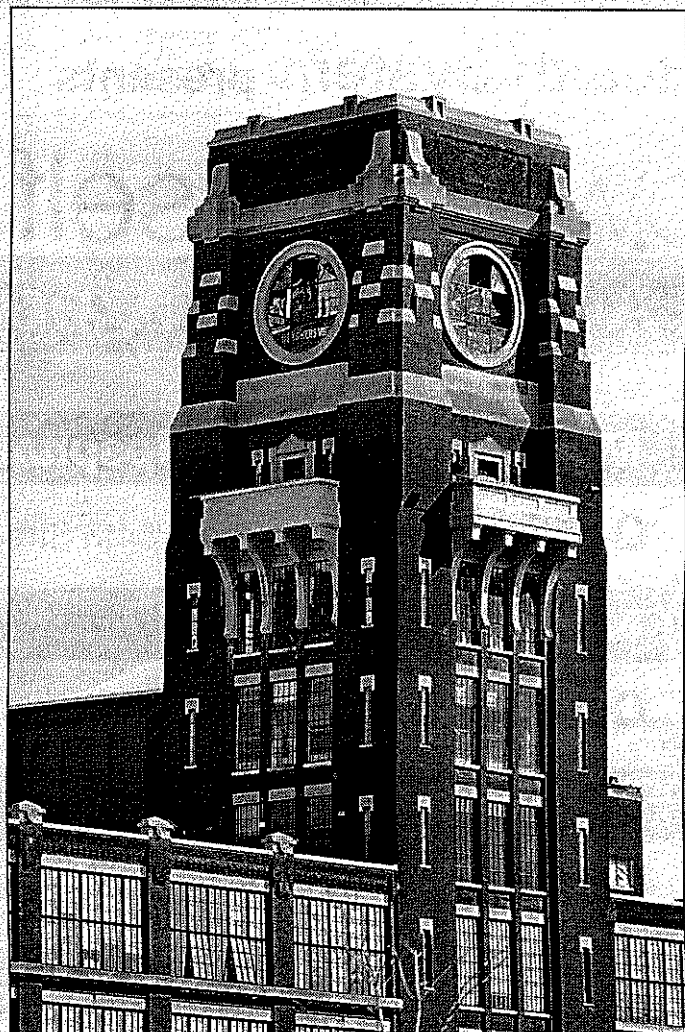
"I continue to be Camden's biggest cheerleader," the developer adds. "We're going to do the Nipper windows right. They're a symbol of what made the city great, and we get that."

The windows also have sentimental value for the thousands of employees of RCA and related companies who still live in South Jersey.

"This means a lot to me," says McHugh, who works for L-3 Communications, the successor to RCA in downtown Camden.

"My mother and father met there in the late '40s and '50s," he says. "If it wasn't for that building, I wouldn't be here."

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ED HILLE / Staff Photographer

Damaged windows in the Victor Lofts building in Camden should be replaced by the end of the year, the contractor said.