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By **STEPHANIE DELLA CAGNA**
Courant Staff Writer

At 2:24 p.m. Sunday, a 3-ton steel wrecking ball smashed into the Harvey & Lewis Opticians Building at the corner of Main and State streets in downtown Hartford.

It took the pear-shaped ball five tries before it was able to leave the first gaping hole in the side of the 1927 granite-and-limestone building.

The Harvey & Lewis building had been the center of controversy for nearly three months.

The Hartford Architecture Conservancy led a campaign to save the building, which it claimed was one of the few surviving examples of art deco architecture in the city. It printed T-shirts and collected petition signatures in an effort to save the building.

Developer Richard H. Gordon said earlier this month that the eight-story building would be demolished to make way for his \$100 million North-east Plaza development project.

The building is not expected to be leveled completely until neighboring tenants on Main Street vacate their stores, Gordon said Sunday. "We can't completely demolish the building until the two



Olga Shalygin / The Hartford Courant

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Workers Frank Chichie, left, and Louis Lenti walk through rubble from the Harvey & Lewis Opticians Building Sunday.

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Razing of Opticians Building Begins

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(stores) are out," he said.

National Discount Stores and Hartford Wig Fair are the Main Street tenants.

"We have agreements with them (the two stores) to leave by March 15," Gordon said.

Northeast Plaza will include three office towers, an atrium and an underground, 500-car parking garage on the 2.5 acre site.

Towers will be built at Main and State streets, at State and Market streets, and at Market and Kingsley streets. Each tower will be 15 to 20 stories high. Half the 250,000-square-foot tower at Main and State streets will be leased to Northeast Savings Bank.

Architect Ernest Flagg's Hart-

ford Federal Savings & Loan Building at 50 State St. will be included in the project's design.

Toni A. Gold, conservancy executive director, said, "It's a sad and unnecessary loss for the city. The issue now becomes the quality of the building that will replace it."

The Connecticut Historical Commission voted unanimously in December to include the Harvey & Lewis building on the State Register of Historic Places. Inclusion in the state register is only an honorary designation and could not prevent Gordon from razing the building.

When the building was completed in 1927 at a cost of \$150,000, it was described as "representative of a new trend in architecture — the American

perpendicular." It was then the only structure "employing this strictly American motif," reported an article in The Hartford Daily Courant.

The architecture was considered "reactionary" for its time because there were "practically no horizontal lines and no cornices," The Courant article said.

Four gargoyles reflecting an optical theme were placed on the building: one holds a pair of binoculars, one a pair of broken glasses, another a pair of repaired glasses and the fourth a box camera.

Gordon has maintained throughout the controversy that the gargoyles will be saved.

"We will be looking for a use for them in the new project," Gordon said. "We have the original casts that they were made in."