

Cities considering uses for aged industrial plants

BUFFALO, N.Y. — When Mary Lynne and Dan Kautz chose a place to hold their wedding reception, they didn't book a grand ballroom in some pricey hotel or a lavish suburban catering hall. Instead, they picked a crumbling, decrepit former train station in a run-down neighborhood on Buffalo's east side.

Everything had to be brought to the Central Terminal, including food, beverages and portable restrooms. Nearly 300 guests danced amid the semi-ruin of the old main concourse to tunes played by a cover band powered by one of the generators set up because there were fewer than a dozen working electrical outlets in the cavernous building.

"I basically told my family, 'I rented a concrete tent,'" said Dan Kautz, a 43-year-old **financial** adviser from Amherst.

The Central Terminal symbolizes a problem facing Buffalo and many other Rust Belt communities: What can be done with massive, often-derelict industrial and transportation structures? Tearing them down can **cost** millions of dollars; redeveloping them is even costlier.

The answer for now — in Buffalo, at least — is to hold festivals and dance in them or

attract large groups for tours. Buffalo and other cities are looking for opportunities to give the public a glimpse of what some consider America's "ruins" and showcase preservation efforts.

Getting to the point where a developer is willing to plunk down millions of dollars on a rehabilitation project at a 500,000-square-foot industrial site is a major hurdle.

"It's a little different than trying to save an 18th-century farmhouse somewhere," conceded Marty Biniasz, spokesman for the Central Terminal Restoration Corp.

The station served as the city's rail hub for 70 years before closing in 1979. The restoration group has owned it since 1997.

In many parts of the nation, the Northeast and Midwest in particular, cities burdened with massive, idled industrial buildings are weighing the likelihood of redevelopment against the cost of demolition.

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Detroit's Michigan Central Station, a Great Lakes bookend to Buffalo's Central Terminal, is the focus of the Motor City's best-known preservation effort.

"It's definitely something that's a gem," said John Mohyi, a 23-year-old who works in technology development for a Detroit aerospace company and who serves as president of the Michigan Central Station Preservation Society. "Maybe a diamond in the rough at this time, but it's coming to life slowly but surely."

The 500,000-square-foot station with an 18-story office tower opened in 1913 and was Detroit's main passenger rail depot until Amtrak service halted there in early 1988. The property was left to deteriorate and was picked clean by scavengers. It came to symbolize Detroit blight. In 2009, the city council voted to tear it down.

That sparked a grassroots effort to save the station, with advocates using social media to rally support. The station's owner, Manuel "Matty" Moroun, head of the Detroit International Bridge Co., has spent more than \$1 million cleaning and stabilizing the property, said company spokeswoman Jennifer Dennis.

Preservation advocates can point to plenty of examples of reuses for old industrial sites:

— A complex of former 19th-century textile mills in Lowell, Mass., now home to a national park, residential units and offices.

— Defunct steel mills in Pittsburgh and Bethlehem, Pa., reborn as casinos.

— Another 1800s mill complex, just north of Albany, renovated into upscale loft apartments overlooking the Mohawk River in Cohoes.

At Buffalo's Central Terminal, no one seemed to mind the surroundings on the Kautz's wedding day in August 2007. Younger guests saw a storied Buffalo landmark they had only heard or read about, while older guests were thrilled just to be inside it once again, no matter the condition.

"We liked the symbolism of having it there," said Mary Lynne Kautz, 47, a Spanish and French teacher in suburban Clarence.

The 83-year-old Art Deco building is much tidier today, yet still in need of major infusions of money to restore its former glory. The nonprofit organization that owns it no longer rents it out for weddings but it continues to host other events — ethnic

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festivals, tours, concerts, expositions. It's an effort to raise **funds** to preserve and, supporters hope, eventually redevelop it into a multipurpose transportation, business and residential complex.

Urban planning expert Dennis Frenchman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology estimates there are thousands of such success stories across the nation. Many cities in the U.S. and Europe have recycled crumbling industrial properties into other uses, either as **business** incubators or cultural and recreational centers, he said.

"To tear it down is not a solution," said Frenchman, a professor in MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning. "In fact, you'll actually have fewer **assets** after you've done that, even if it's an old mill that's falling apart."

There are thousands of abandoned or defunct industrial sites across the U.S. still languishing, although an exact number is hard to come by since there's no single repository for such information, Frenchman said.

In some communities, local leaders want to see the old structures torn down to make way for new development, while others see industrial properties for their heritage value and advocate rehabbing them for other uses.

For some preservation advocates, even the "ruins" have their appeal.

"That's part of the charm," Biniasz said. "The state of decay lends it a very hip, cool atmosphere."

Such an allure is part of what attracts many history buffs, architects and engineers to old industrial sites across the U.S. They'll travel great distances to participate in group tours of defunct train stations, idled power plants and crumbling factories and learn about the sites' roles in building America.

"There's elements of these old industrial sites that are so captivating," said Jay McCauley of the Society of Industrial Archaeology, a 1,500-member group whose membership includes archaeologists, academics and students.

The organization **organizes** annual tours of U.S. industrial sites, with groups typically numbering 100 or more. McCauley, a 64-year-old Silicon Valley retiree, gets strange looks from people when he tells them he's headed to the East Coast to tour old factories. The typical reaction: "You're flying

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all away across the country to look at an old building. Really?"

"But there's a majesty in some of these old buildings," he said.

For McCauley, a Detroit native who lives in San Jose, Calif., seeing the condition of his hometown's old train station during a group tour a few years ago was nearly too much to bear, even for someone with an appreciation for American ruins.

"It broke my heart," he said. "It just makes you cry."

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