



## Union Station linchpin of evolving neighborhood

By **ROBERT BRAUCHLE**

**Observer-Dispatch**

Posted Feb 27, 2011 @ 05:15 PM

Last update Feb 27, 2011 @ 05:56 PM



UTICA — John Hathaway's preferred method of travel isn't train or even bus. But there he sat on a recent day in Union Station, waiting for a ride.

The Utica transplant chose the Main Street station as a meeting point with a friend driving from out of town to take him to Rochester.

"We both know where the station is, so he's picking me up here," Hathaway said. "This place, it's where people from all walks come when they're traveling. It's a checkpoint if you want to travel anywhere in the state."

Named after former U.S. Congressman Sherwood Boehlert, who lobbied for millions of dollars to have the facility renovated in the 1980s, Boehlert Center at Union Station is tucked into a downtown neighborhood on the brink of being redeveloped. The station's multimillion dollar renovation — which included a walkway that allows Amtrak patrons to access a second track — Union Station has drawn people to the Main Street neighborhood.

While officials said there are no plans to expand or renovate Union Station beyond its current standing, neighborhood entrepreneurs say the facility already is a draw for them and a source of revenue for their businesses.

"With the revenue we take in, we're not going to make a profit," said Brian Scala, deputy commissioner of the Oneida County Public Works Department, Division of Highways, Bridges and Structures. "But Union Station is an asset to the area and it's something people can enjoy."

The county-owned station took in about \$105,000 in leases from tenants such as Amtrak, Centro and the Blue Flag Room in 2010. On the expense side, utilities and upkeep cost about \$200,000 annually, Scala said.

Union Station has found itself in a new role in recent years: A beacon attracting developers interested in renovating the long-abandoned buildings nearby who see the station as a source of stability and revenue in the neighborhood.

Within Union Station's walls are an eclectic mix of travel-based businesses and county offices. Union Station houses the county Board of Elections as well as Planning, Probation and Public Defenders offices. The state Department of Motor Vehicles and the Blue Flag Room, a banquet facility, also are separately cordoned off on the station's first floor.

Also on the first floor is the Union Station Barber Shop, which has been owned and operated by Dan Creaco Sr. for more than five decades.

Creaco said times have changed from the days when trains pushed through Utica at a constant pace and a man could get a haircut while waiting for the next engine to arrive. Now, he mainly serves regular customers who seek him out instead of the wayward dapper traveler in need of a trim on the fly. Business still is good, though, and the building is in tip-top shape, he said.

Travelers and officials said renovations that began in the 1970s and continued into the last decade have turned the once run-down Union Station in to an attraction for travelers and diners.

"It was a sad place, one of those places that really needed a lot of upkeep," Scala said. "But with the renovations, Union Station has been a place that has worked well for the county."

Developers in the immediate area, including Bagg's Square, see the offices in Union Station as a source of clientele.

Francis Pezzolanella spent his lunch hour earlier this week wrists deep in a batch of salads he was mixing for customers at Bagg's Sq. Café. Pezzolanella co-owns the five-story Cobblestone Building at 421 Broad St. with his father, Michael. The pair renovated the building and opened the café earlier this year.

The younger Pezzolanella said he is drawing crowds from the tenants upstairs, but also from the county workers at Union Station and other nearby businesses.

"People feel like they're seeing progress here," he said. "They've passed this building for years and years and they see us working here. Then, if they want to walk in, we're more approachable because there's a café as soon as they walk in."

Pezzolanella said the city should find ways to connect areas such as Harbor Point and Genesee Street to Bagg's Square. Doing so, he said, would help the entire area.

"These places should be accessible by foot," he said. "That's when you'll see real development."

City Urban and Economic Development Commissioner Randy Soggs said the combination of long-term “anchors” as well as the area’s unique building stock is helping the Main Street area.

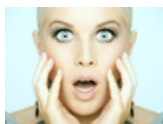
“It’s what you’re seeing as a trend country-wide,” Soggs said. “People are starting to repopulate urban areas and they’re looking around for the stability of long-term anchors as something that can help them out.”

Soggs said more and more developers will invest in a neighborhood once a handful of initial businesses find success in areas that had long been forgotten.

“What traditionally happens is that stores and other service type businesses will follow,” Soggs said. “Once you get at critical mass in the neighborhood, it will spill over in to other areas.”

Copyright 2011 The Observer-Dispatch, Utica, New York. Some rights reserved

Advertisement



These 4 things happen right before a heart attack.



How this strange African fruit is making Americans skinny.



New York: Is it a scam? We investigated a work at home story and what we found may shock you!



Do not buy until you read this 4 week study on the results of using the E-Cigarette to quit smoking.



Millions shocked at how bad their credit scores are. Instantly see how bad your score is.



Utica - New trick now allows New York drivers to cut their insurance cost in half.

## Popular Videos



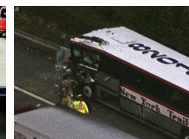
Seaweed Eyed As a Green Fuel Source



Boston firefighter catches boy after 3-story drop



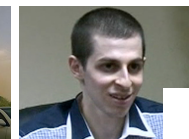
Drunken Dad Allegedly Forces Daughter, 9, to Drive



Raw Video: Passenger Bus Crashes in New York



Raw Video: Dust Storm Rolls Through Texas



Military: Gilad Schalit Now in Israel

Loading commenting interface...

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [About our Ads](#)

The Observer-Dispatch, Utica, New York | (315) 792-5000 | 221 Oriskany Plaza Utica, NY 13501

Copyright © 2006-2011 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a [Creative Commons](#) license, except where noted.

SEO by eLocalListing | [Advertiser profiles](#) | [RadarFrog Merchant Directory](#) | [Contest Rules](#)