



AURORA DOWNTOWN QUARTERLY MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

AUGUST 1, 2009

FRIENDS OF LA SALLE STREET GET ORGANIZED

Though many are content to sit around and talk about how things might get better, the La Salle Street property owners have demonstrated that they are not just idle talkers – they are people of action. After a series of “meet and greet” gatherings that began in March of this year, they have taken a number of steps to show that they mean serious business. A 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization has been formed - the Friends of La Salle Street - and plans are underway for the first LaSalle Street Car Show on October 4, 2009. Their intention in 2010 is to produce ten such shows.

The block from Downer Place to Benton Street is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as “La Salle Street Historic Auto Row,” so this group’s improvement efforts are well-aligned with its past. The long-range goal of the Friends of La Salle Street is to attract new tenants and owners with automobile-related businesses and interests. Tasks on the beautification “to-do” list include the installation of street pavers, the hanging of decorative banners on the existing light poles, and ultimately, the addition of iconic arches at Downer Place and Benton Street to identify the block as a destination. The Friends, under the leadership of officers Joe Dispensa (President), Shirley Flaherty (Vice President), Sandy Spang (Treasurer), and Kaye Mason (Secretary) have embarked on fundraising efforts, and have applied for a grant from Aurora Downtown to assist in their endeavors.

DOWNTOWN AURORAN MAGAZINE LAUNCHED AND SOARING

The first issue of the Downtown Auroran magazine was greeted with great excitement, and many positive comments, including, “Why hasn’t anyone thought of doing this before?” Publisher and writer Marissa Amoni is hard at work to create the second issue, which is scheduled to be released in mid-September and will be available to readers through the end of 2009.

The initial first-issue run of 1000 copies may be expanded to 2500, based on advertising support. You’ve got until August 15th to purchase an ad that will reach a regional

audience of readers interested in arts and culture in Aurora, including visitors to the October 9th ArtWalk. Content is welcome, too – and can range from artwork to fiction, essays, poetry, recipes, reviews, etc. Contact Ms. Amoni at 630-674-2099 or downtownauroran@gmail.com.

BUILDING IMPROVEMENT CONTINUES

Below is a list of the Certificates of Appropriateness approved for projects from May, 2009 through July, 2009:

- 19 S. Lincoln, Rivera, install new roof
- 14 – 20 N. Broadway, Ekus Realty, begin phased façade improvement project
- 18 W. Benton, SciTech, install banners
- 40 W. Downer, Serdean, remove stucco and repaint
- 220 E. Galena, Chapa, repair roof
- 7 N. Broadway, Chicago Style Shop, replace window glass
- 44 W. Downer, Duta, paint signboard; install fascia sign
- 223 E. Spring Street/E. New York Street, Dolan & Murphy, install temporary ground signs (variance)
- 22 E. Downer, Falcon, repair rear wall and door
- 44 E. Galena, Reuland, install six new awnings
- 13 N. Broadway, Filas, paint exterior to match existing
- 218 E. Benton, Trinity Episcopal Church, install architectural lighting
- 31 S. Broadway, Sifuentes, install fascia sign
- 68-70 S. La Salle, Whisler/Yellin, repair masonry; replace rooftop skylights
- 50-52 N. Broadway, Castro, install Lincoln Highway mural on north wall
- 25 N. Broadway, Diaz, rebuild rear masonry wall
- 62 S. Broadway, Frantz, repair windows
- 13 S. Water, Mayor's Office of Special Events, install banner for Downtown Alive
- 44 E. Downer, City of Aurora, paint support columns, annex
- 44 E. Downer, City of Aurora, replace corroded panels, annex
- 28 W. New York, Ballydoyle, banner for Downtown Alive
- 1 W. Downer, Yellin, repaint exterior plywood
- 75-77 S. LaSalle, Dispensa, paint window and door trim
- 27-29 N. Broadway, Zuno, repair masonry
- 220 E. Downer, Downer Place Lofts, repair masonry
- 218 E. Galena, Ford, repair porch and stairs
- 60 S. River, Hites, install temporary banner
- 28 W. New York, Ballydoyle, revise deck plans

DOWNER PLACE BRIDGES – STAGING AND SCHEDULING INPUT

At the July 16th Aurora Downtown Board of Directors meeting, Bob Davies of the engineering consulting firm SEC Group, Inc. gave an update on the Downer Place Bridges

reconstruction, and presented staging and detour alternatives for consideration and input.

Three alternatives were discussed, with the recommendation made that the City select Option 1: "Full Closure, Both Bridges," as the choice that would be the most cost-effective and require the shortest construction time. Comments were solicited from the audience, and included suggestions for signage to mitigate confusion among motorists and minimize problems for trucks. SEC staff reported that all comments will be summarized and submitted to the Illinois Department of Transportation, along with new bridge plans, by the end of 2009. Design will be undertaken during 2010. Demolition of the existing 100-year old structures and construction of the new bridges are tentatively scheduled for 2011. Anyone wishing to submit comments or get more information about the project should contact Chris Lirot, City of Aurora Public Works Department, 630-844-3620, or clirot@aurora-il.org.

LIVING DOWNTOWN TOUR: SECRETS REVEALED!

On Sunday, June 14, 2009, downtown Aurora property owners hosted their first-ever "Living Downtown Tour," showcasing 11 historic structures that have been rehabbed for contemporary business and residential use. The tour featured apartments, condos and business spaces with modern upscale updates in historic settings.

Nearly 400 people took advantage of an insider's peek at these unique spaces. Tour participants came from communities throughout the Chicagoland region, and from as far away as Iowa. Many walked the neighborhood, while others rode a trolley, guided by docents Hal Beebee, John Jaros, Lane Allen, and Jeanne Norris. Forty volunteers staffed the event, acting as ambassadors at each site and at two hospitality suites where refreshments were served and questions were answered.

The venues open for the day included:

- 64 E. Downer Place, Italianate-style commercial building , built circa 1865
- 220 E. Downer Place, Downer Place Lofts, built circa 1800s
- 20 W. Downer Place, Stolp Woolen Mill Dye House, built circa 1858
- 36 W. Downer Place, Woodworth Cart Factory, built circa 1857
- 2 N. Stolp Avenue, Aurora Hotel (now North Island Apartments), built circa 1917
- 7 S. Stolp, Leland Tower (now Fox Island Place Apartments), built circa 1928
- 67 S. Stolp Avenue, Aurora Woolen Mill Factory, built circa 1800s
- 121 W. Benton Street, Holbrook Mill, built circa 1843
- 60 S. River Street, three-story building on the Frazier Block, built circa 1900
- 100 S. River Street, River Street Plaza, new construction, 2007
- 74-76 S. LaSalle Street, Theiss Building, built circa 1912

Among the highlights of the tour was the chance to ride an Otis freight elevator at 74-76 S. Stolp, installed because the building was originally constructed as an auto dealership;

the structure is now part of the historic La Salle Street Auto Row National Register District. Tour participants were quite taken by the Holbrook Mill, a complex reclamation project that visitors found to be “simply amazing.” The building was deconstructed so a foundation could be poured and is now being reconstructed as a private residence for David Lewis, Executive Director of the Aurora Regional Fire Museum. Dan and Oksana Hites, owners of several downtown properties, welcomed visitors to their home, with a “fabulous river view,” in the heart of the Stolp Island National Register District. Another “big surprise” was the 5000+ square foot loft space being built as a private residence for Kit and Ernesto Ochoa, owners of Sergio Furniture.

Throughout the day people expressed their delight at having a chance to see, first-hand, such spectacular and unusual projects. Many commented on the extraordinary natural light that bathed each building interior, thanks to floor-to-ceiling windows in many of the spaces. Exposed brick, natural coarse limestone, and a myriad of architectural details separate these rehabbed residences from their modern counterparts, and drew “oohs” and “aahs” from the visitors. Nearly everyone remarked on the convenience of living downtown, which includes easy access to the Route 25 Transportation Center, the Paramount Theatre, Riverfront Playhouse, downtown museums (the David L. Pierce Art and History Center, the Aurora Regional Fire Museum, and SciTech) as well as unique, independently-owned businesses and specialty eateries like La France Bakery, River’s Edge Café, La Quinta de los Reyes, Tecalitlan Restaurant, and the Ballydoyle Irish Pub. A number of “tourists” reported that they were big fans of the Aurora ArtWalk, as well as the City’s summer festivals, and looked forward to a growing arts and entertainment scene in downtown Aurora.

COM ED OFFERS SMART IDEAS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

In an effort to promote energy efficiency and savings for its commercial customers, ComEd has created a program of incentives called *Smart Ideas*, which are listed below. For more details and application information, visit www.ComEd.com/Bizincentives.

- Retrofit lighting, motors, HVAC, and refrigeration systems
- Evaluate/analyze building systems to find cost-saving measures
- Improve indoor air control and quality
- Eliminate “hot” and “cold” spots
- Optimize chiller operations
- Reduce supply air temperature and fan speed in air handling units
- Analyze energy consumption using a free, web-based system
- View and generate reports regarding your energy consumption data

Incentives are also available for residential customers, including replacement of incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents, appliance recycling, air conditioning system tune-ups, and air conditioning cycling. You can find information about ComEd’s *Smart Ideas for Your Home* at www.ComEd.com, or 888-806-2273.

ARTWALK CALLS FOR FOX VALLEY ARTISTS

Never known for resting on their laurels, the Cultural Creatives are knee-deep in planning for the 3rd Aurora ArtWalk, set for Friday, October 9, 2009 from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. Nine downtown venues have been identified to host dancers, painters, performers, vocalists, poets, sculptors, spoken word artists, ceramicists, authors, singers/songwriters, installation artists, environmental artists, and musicians of all genres. Those interested in submitting work for possible inclusion in the ArtWalk must do so no later than August 17, 2009. Visit www.auroraartwalk.com for application information. In addition, the Paramount Theatre, the Aurora Public Art Commission, and Waubensee Community College will feature artists and musicians to add to the fun. Check videos, photos, and more on the ArtWalk website, and at www.youtube.com and www.flickr.com.

GET YOUR WEB ON

For many years, Aurora Downtown has provided an Internet-based business directory at www.auroradowntown.org to help you promote your business or service. Kate Kroger, our summer intern, has been making the rounds, talking to business owners about the information displayed in the directory. She is determined to ensure that the business directory is accurate, up-to-date, and showcases your unique offerings to the public. Check your listing; we have tried to include basic facts, but can expand the text with your help and creativity. We can add photos, logos, and more copy. Contact Jennifer Grobe, Preservation/Downtown Planning Specialist, to make additions or corrections. You can reach Jennie at 630-844-3649, or jgrobe@aurora-il.org.

We've also got a presence on Facebook! Go to www.facebook.com and type Aurora Downtown in the search box. You'll get up-to-date event information and photos, and connect with business owners and customers. We've been live on Facebook since July 23rd, and already have over 100 fans. You can link your website and fan pages, and spread the word about special promotions or events of your own. And, because we love photos, we're also on Flickr. Visit www.flickr.com, type Aurora Downtown in the search box, and enjoy! Feel free to post your own photos. Plus, if you want to see how small businesses around the country are using Flickr to promote themselves, just type any kind of business into the search box (e.g., bakery, hair salon), and watch what happens. This is great, free marketing. Many people are finding cool stuff just by stumbling upon it. Shouldn't they find you? Don't be afraid to jump into the water!

If you've got questions, just call Linda Chomiak (630-844-3670, lchomiak@aurora-il.org) or Jennie Grobe for help.

SPOTLIGHT ON A NEIGHBOR

Spotlight on: *John and Evelyn Clark, Wardell Art Glass*

Contact info: *630-896-4181, 28 S. Stolp Avenue*

One of the best things about working in downtown Aurora is discovering the specialty businesses located here. We are home to some extremely unique enterprises and entrepreneurs like John and Evelyn Clark, owners of Wardell Art Glass, which is located in the Keystone Building – one of Prairie School architect George Grant Elmslie’s designs.

Wardell Art Glass has been located at 28 S. Stolp for 13 years. Prior to that time, they occupied a studio in St. Charles for 15 years. When the owner presented them with a 60-day notice to vacate their space, they were in a quandary – puzzled as to where they might relocate. As luck would have it, a casual stroll just blocks from their own home in Aurora led them to the “for rent” sign on Stolp – and the building which seems naturally intended for them became their new home. They describe their landlord, Blaire Bobo, as having a completely opposite response from what they received when they called other building owners about renting space. Ms. Bobo was enthusiastic and welcoming, and did not question the viability of their business. Within a short time they were settled in a place that now seems “serendipitous” to them...the beautiful terra cotta detailing and unique design of the Keystone Building fit perfectly with the meticulous craftsmanship and care that their glass work exhibits.

John and Evelyn told me that they met as students at West Chicago Community High School, where they both spent a great deal of time hanging out in the art room. John worked to improve his drawing, Evelyn was intrigued by sculpture, but both were taken by all things arts-related. They remained friends after graduation. John began work in Chicago in what he termed an “anti-apprenticeship” – not the grand old tradition of learning from the masters, but instead, churning out large quantities of Tiffany-style stained glass, without much concern for quality or details. “Our focus was the opposite of what we do at Wardell; we concentrated on getting things out the door, filling semi-trailers as quickly as possible. I liked the material, but we were not making anything particularly beautiful. I can say now that my real apprenticeship has never stopped; I still am consciously trying to improve my skills and craft.”

The friendship between John and Evelyn continued; Evelyn characterized their relationship as “anti-dating.” She sought out ways to fulfill her artistic drive and interest (and the necessity of paying the rent), dabbling here, there, and everywhere – and finally became a seamstress, working in Seattle for a company that did huge cloth installations and banners for buildings with giant atriums, placed in locations throughout the U.S. Before the giant fabric sculptures could be assembled, Evelyn’s task was to draw the patterns and make the prototypes, which “pulled at some things that had lain dormant in me for awhile.” By this time, John and Evelyn had been friends for 19 years.

Evelyn moved back to the area, they got married, and, “I started my apprenticeship with Wardell; we’ve been partners ever since.”

I asked the origin of the business name, Wardell. John explained that this was his mother’s maiden name, and that his grandparents had been significant influences on him. “My grandmother was incredible, artistic beyond belief, musical, naturally gifted. My grandfather was an amazing guy, very important in my young life, always encouraging me and us in this endeavor. When it came time to name the business, it just seemed appropriate.”

We talked about projects that are currently underway. The Clarks are working on the stained glass windows at the Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Hall on Downer Place. John said the project is being done in phases; first is the restoration of the existing glass, and second will be creating panels based on the ones that were removed in 1910. “We have completed Phase 1, and are in the midst of Phase 2, which is very exciting...it’s nice to make new work that is supposed to look old. We have been very successful, given that we have scant information from which we can draw ideas. There are precious few photographs. We have some examples of windows from the same time period. We think we have come up with some good designs that will look natural and appropriate to the meaning of the building. You have to presume a little, but you don’t want to presume too much. We want people to agree that we’ve arrived at fitting designs.”

John and Evelyn are also involved in a large project at 70 S. La Salle Street, where they are restoring prismatic transoms above the storefront of the building. John explained that at one time there were many similar transoms downtown. Some have been covered, others have been removed. The prismatic transoms were a common architectural element, used to throw natural light to the back of the building. As lighting technology advanced, they became less important, but they add attractive detail to the façade. In the case of 70 S. La Salle, the Clarks are expanding the number of transoms from eight to ten sections, which changed the dimensions. “We are making adjustments and reconstructing everything in a manner so viewers will feel that everything is appropriate. This is actually a case of adaptive reuse versus restoration or repair. The final product will be wonderful, though different from what is shown in historic photos. You’ll note that there will be a very nice horizontal band of prismatic pieces, a detail which should raise the value of the building. These are the kinds of elements that were frequently removed from buildings; something lost and then later regretted.”

Evelyn described her favorite restoration glass project as the windows for Christ Episcopal Church in Madison, Indiana (visit this website to see pictures: http://www.ccecmadison.indydio.org/our_history.htm).

She explained that they spent ten years restoring the windows for the church, which had been built in 1838. Evelyn spoke lovingly of the “incredible chancel window, which

is an example of some of the oldest American-made stained glass, existing in its original setting. It is stunning, but when I first saw it, it was so dirty and so broken...someone had put a board over it, which baked the glass and turned it yellow; it was the ugliest thing I had ever seen.

“As the restoration progressed, it was an amazing thing to see that our work revealed such a beautiful wall of glass – the most stunning thing I’ve ever seen. The congregation agreed, and asked us to restore the rest of the glass. This is the job by which all other jobs are measured. I wish all projects could be this good; the clients loved us, appreciated what we did - it was the perfect job, and when it ended, it was truly sad, because we just loved going down there, we fell in love with the town, the church, the congregation. They published a book about the restoration of the windows, because they are very significant in the world of American stained glass, very important, a feather in our cap.

“We feel very privileged to have been part of this. I have a framed photograph of the chancel window because I love that glass. At the dedication ceremony, businesspeople came, as did conservators from back East. It was just wonderful. We’ve done some nice jobs, and have been blessed with great commissions, but this moved us to tears. It was the kind of inspirational project you wish you could do every day of your life. Of course, we are grateful for simple jobs too, fixing what has been broken. We don’t always work with stained glass. People come to us because we do excellent work...the more pedestrian projects provide our bread and butter, keep the lights on, until the really choice jobs come along.”

Evelyn continued, “Over the years we have developed a pretty extensive list of references to show people. It was John’s dream, when he started in the 1960s, that he would keep learning more and more. He believed that he could do better than what he was turning out in the Chicago manufacturing operation.”

In describing her husband’s passion for quality, Evelyn talked about John’s desire to go out on his own. He believed deeply that he could do beautiful glass work, and did not want to be constrained by a boss who felt that customers would not know or care about the difference between “good” and “superior.” According to Evelyn, John wanted to have the final say over whether or not the end product was good enough. He started attending restoration seminars, and worked, when feasible, with a master glass painter from back east. Evelyn said, “John always wanted to better himself, so that when the fine jobs came along, he would be ready for them, and be able to say, ‘we have restored Tiffany windows.’ It is such a thrill just to have your hand on that kind of glass. My job is to help John do his best work.”

Evelyn is a gifted photographer besides being a skilled glass artisan. “It’s what I do for fun,” she told me. “I have no formal training. I have a 35mm camera which will be buried with me because I love it. I hope they keep making film as long as I live because I don’t want to do digital.

“I’ve always like taking photographs because there are compositions everywhere, if you just have the right way of looking at things. There are astonishing things - if you focus on what’s around you - that make amazing patterns. I see them and think, ‘that’s a nice photograph.’

“I started doing this to amuse myself. I do all the photo documentation at the studio. In those odd moments when we’re in a church, if I’m not photographing the glass, I’m noticing unusual things, and I just started snapping photos. People saw my photos and suggested I make them into notecards. Since I am one of the few people left on the planet who likes writing letters to let people know how I feel, that seemed like a great idea.

“You might say that the photographs are guarded poems...I can express myself, without making myself as vulnerable as the poet who puts words on paper. There’s a certain something that I’m trying to convey, that I can’t do with words on the page. The notecards are so basic, so low tech - just paper and an Xacto knife. This is something I do besides glass just to stay sane and explore my feelings.”

Evelyn’s notecards are available in the studio, as are other gift items related to early 20th century art and design – and her photography was on display at the first Aurora ArtWalk, September 12, 2008. I encourage you to stop by this magical studio. We are fortunate to have such talented master craftspeople as the Clarks in our midst.

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Please join us for Aurora Downtown Board meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month at 8:00 a.m., Conference Room 5B, City Hall, 44 E. Downer Place.

Indeed, the times are tough, but that shouldn’t prevent you from washing your windows, sweeping your sidewalks, freshening your displays, improving your signage, and offering the best customer service possible to everyone who enters your place of business. Unique spaces, friendly faces, and special people are what make downtown Aurora shine!

Have a great summer...and do not hesitate to call me if I can be of help in any way!

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