

DOWNTOWN WEST BEND



Museum director sees potential for artists' district

The executive director of the Museum of Wisconsin Art is hoping the new River Bluffs town-house project will be used to attract local artists to the area.

"Now that it's moving forward, we'd like to encourage the developer to have artists from around Wisconsin become renters," said Tom Lidtke.

River Bluffs is a new nine building, 36-rental unit complex that will be built on Wisconsin Street on nearly three acres located just east of the Eisenbahn State Trail.

"We haven't told that to anyone, but we would hope we could begin a dialogue to talk about making the housing available to artists," Lidtke said.

Lidtke profiled the "vast majority of artists" as college-educated creative thinkers.

"Whenever artists move into a district, they have a very positive impact," he said.

The idea of a downtown district to reach out to the arts community is not new.

Paducah, Ky., has made a concerted attempt to lure artists to its historic district in an effort to revitalize the formerly blighted downtown. Mark Barone coordinates its Artist Relocation

Program.

"Artists give back in a lot of ways," he said. "They are an economic engine."

According to the Lower Town Arts District Web site: "Paducah already has 21 artists and more are packing up to move to Paducah in the near future."

Closer to home, Milwaukee's Historic Third Ward as another example of artists having an impact on real estate, Lidtke said.

"In 1976 it was one of about six major warehouse districts in the United States and that's when the artists started to move in because they needed inexpensive places to go," he said. "Now look at the Third Ward today."

The July issue of Crafts Report, a monthly business magazine for the crafts professional, published a feature article on the Historic Third Ward and just how successful that was due to the art scene.

"We have to make the best out of things," said Lidtke. "The Historic Third Ward is now so upscale that a lot of the young artists are looking for inexpensive housing and studio space is no longer there."

"The next generation of young artists is looking for hip, trendy

places and whether our city has those amenities or not, that has to be considered," he said.

"Certainly we have a lot of spaces that might accommodate that type of development and we might want to consider that as a city."

"I've been floating this idea with a few people and I'm hoping to get the city leaders to start talking about this," he said. "I think it's at least worth looking at."

Husar's founder dies

Jeweler Marvin Husar, founder of Husar's House of Fine Diamonds, was remembered for his business contributions to the downtown and to the community, including starting the annual West Bend Christmas Parade, the second oldest in the state.

He died Thursday, June 3, of a heart attack at the age of 83.

His son Michael Husar said, "He had a special spot in his heart for people in general. I think that's what made him what he was. He really liked kids. That showed in some of the events in the city that he put together."

Peggy Fischer, owner of Shooting Star Travel, who had her business across the street

from Husar's, remembered an autograph signing with Green Bay Packers Ahman Green her son Nate went to a few years ago at Husar's.

"I just remember him sitting back and smiling and enjoying it all," she said of Marv Husar.

Michael Husar said his father, who liked to golf, fish and hunt, appreciated the community that was close to Milwaukee but surrounded by country, which made it a great place to raise a family.

"They supported him and helped make him what he was, and there's just a lot of great people."

When downtown people talked of Marv, everyone knew they were talking about Husar.

"He's brought a lot of awareness to West Bend," Fischer said. "You think of all the marketing that was done."

Marv Husar founded the jewelry store in 1951 in a 200-square-foot shop in West Bend. He moved to different locations in the downtown as the business grew, opening in 1995 in the former JC Penney's store, 131 N. Main St. He extensively remodeled the site as blueprints to expand his previous store gathered dust.

"The interesting thing about

him was that he had no formal business training," said his son.

Marv Husar was the first Certified Gemologist in Wisconsin and he centered his business on his most beloved stone – the diamond.

"The best way to get the best diamonds was from cutters in South Africa and he figured out how to do it in the 1950s," said Michael Husar.

"No one wanted to sell him the rings without the stones so he had to figure out how to make his own rings."

"He started a jewelry manufacturing business so he could totally control the quality," Michael Husar said of the operation still in the store.

Dedication to quality was his trademark, he said of his dad. "From little on I was told there is no word like can't."

The senior Husar also figured out the importance of billboard advertising to the business, buying a sign company early on.

"He was a visionary. He definitely had a business vision to make things better," said Michael Husar.

His vision was instrumental in re-development of West Bend's downtown in the early 1980s.

DOWNTOWN WEST BEND

MUSIC ON MAIN

Thursday Nights
June 10 to August 26

6:30pm - 9:00pm in Old Settler's Park
Weather Permitting ~ Bring your Lawn Chairs!

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jun 17	Back Alley (blues) <i>Sponsored by M&I Bank</i>
jun 24	Kojo (Caribbean reggae) <i>Sponsored by Shooting Star Travels</i>
jul 01	Rhythm Kings (rock & R&B) <i>Sponsored by Westbury Bank</i>
jul 08	Geoff Landon & The Wolfpack (country) <i>Sponsored by DWBA</i>
jul 15	Houndstooth (country & blues) <i>Sponsored by Waterstone Mortgage Group</i>
jul 22	The Liam Ford Band (rockabilly) <i>Sponsored by TBA</i>
jul 29	Saddlebrook (modern country & original works) <i>Sponsored by Daily News</i>
aug 05	4 Lane Highway (country) <i>Sponsored by PNC Bank</i>
aug 12	Alter Ego (classic rock) <i>Sponsored by PNC Bank</i>
aug 19	Genuine Drive (modern country) <i>Sponsored by PNC Bank</i>
aug 26	Musik off Main Oil Can Harry <i>Held at the Germanfest Grounds</i>

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