

PRESERVATION *Buffalo Niagara*

Building on the past for our FUTURE

Executive Director's Remarks

2011 Awards Luncheon May 19, 2011

Genesee Gateway Project with *Special Thanks to The Margaret L. Wendt Foundation*

Good Afternoon

I am Henry McCartney, PBNs executive director and I would like to also thank the award winners, our sponsors and all those that have made this luncheon possible.

I asked to personally make the presentation for the Genesee Gateway Project for several reasons. The first reason is that there once was a well-known sign on the Genesee Gateway Buildings: "Last Person to Leave Buffalo Please Turn off the Lights". But today, we honor the revitalization of these historic buildings, while celebrating how similar historic preservation projects are bringing new energy and vitality to Buffalo.

This new energy and vitality is very evident at the Genesee Gateway.

This was once a row of thriving two and four story commercial buildings. This row had buildings of some notable architects, including Esenwein & Johnson, F. W. Caulkins. Richard Waite. Waite's Werner Photographic Building and its large copper skylight are immortalized in Charles Burchfields "Street Scene" that he painted in the 1940s.

Of course, what we today call the Genesee Gateway was a row of buildings that for many years epitomized urban decay. It is also a row of buildings that and would have been lost without an extraordinary effort and commitment. Since the 1960s these buildings suffered from disinvestment, neglect, misguided rehabilitation attempts and significant deterioration.

What has brought these buildings back? Through the efforts of City View Properties and Flynn Battaglia Architects, and the Margaret L. Wendt Foundation, these buildings were stabilized -- and just barely in time. One almost collapsed during construction, and would have taken several other buildings with it.

The historic street's facades have been restored and wherever possible, the exterior and interior elements have been reused. As important, a rescue plan was developed allowing this block to be consolidated to work economically, making it functional in many ways as a single building. A central lobby was created with an elevator and stairwell that allowed access to the upper floors of all these buildings. The result has been to transform this crumbling block into contemporary offices and retail uses.

Overseeing the transformation of this important row are Doug Swift of City View Properties and Peter Flynn of Flynn Battaglia Architects. They have come forward to receive our PBNs thanks and our Rehabilitation/Adaptive Use award. I also want to honor the Trustees of The Margaret L. Wendt Foundation separately. They are also receiving an award for the Genesee Gateway Project, for their vision and significant support that made the Genesee Gateway possible.

But we could not simply provide the Margaret Wendt Foundation with this award without recognizing their long history of support for historic preservation and other key activities in Buffalo.

I am a relative newcomer to Buffalo, but I know first hand the commitment of the Wendt Foundation and its Trustees. In 1987, Tom Lunt, Bob Kresse and the late Rev. Ralph Lowe came to Rochester to ask Rochester's Landmark Society, which I then directed, to help with their plan to rescue the Roycroft Inn. I think Tom and I participated in over a 100 meetings of what was then called the Roycroft Revitalizations Corporation and it was the unwavering support of The Margaret L. Wendt Foundation that made the revitalization of the Roycroft Inn possible.

The Roycroft Inn was once considered to be one of the country's most endangered landmarks. Instead, in 1995 it received a national award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation for its revitalization.

The Roycroft and the Genesee Gateway are only two of the Wendt Foundation's significant projects, which also include St Mary's of Sorrows, now housing the King Urban Life Center, leadership support for the Darwin Martin House's restoration, support for Graycliffe and many others.

I have naturally focused on these historic preservation projects, but Buffalo would be a less vibrant city today if The Margaret L Wendt Foundation was not here to provide support when needed for the Buffalo Philharmonic, for the Albright Knox, for area hospitals, and for so much more.

I guess a foundation cannot receive a lifetime achievement award – and I know that The Margaret L. Wendt Foundation will continue to serve Buffalo and this region for many lifetimes to come. But let's give a warm round of applause to Tom Lunt, Bob Kresse, Janet Day and the Margaret L. Wendt Foundation for their support of the Genesee Gateway and for everything they do to improve our region.