

ALL ABOARD

On June 22, 1958, the last passenger train left Newburgh's **West Shore Station**. The handsome structure, built in 1909 by Warren and Wetmore, the architectural firm that designed Grand Central Station, was abandoned and left to rot. It was the only building left standing after botched urban renewal efforts in the 1960s and '70s leveled three blocks of what had once been a vibrant downtown waterfront—and in the process helped to drastically change the character of the city.

The station is now the focus of a multi-million dollar renovation aimed at helping to resurrect some of the vibrant, commercial character that once was Newburgh. If successful, it would be a stellar example of "**adaptive reuse**," one of the guiding principles of sustainable living.

Before the interstate highway system, suburban sprawl and urban renewal, Newburgh, only 60 miles from Manhattan, was a destination spot on the river. New York Central trains carried passengers along the scenic Hudson shoreline to Albany or Weehawken, New Jersey, where they could catch a ferry to New York City. Commuters rode the rails to jobs at The United States Military Academy at West Point and The Haverstraw Brickyards. During WWII, soldiers shipped out or returned home from the station.

By the late 1950s, passenger service on the west side of the river had ceased and the station sat abandoned for half a century. Fires in 1992 and again in 2008 destroyed most of the original structure; the ceilings and roof collapsed, and the intricately patterned brick façade was covered with graffiti. It sat like a carcass on the side of the road in Newburgh's East End Historic District, named in 1996 one of 11 "Most Endangered Historic Places" in the nation by The National Trust for Historic Preservation.

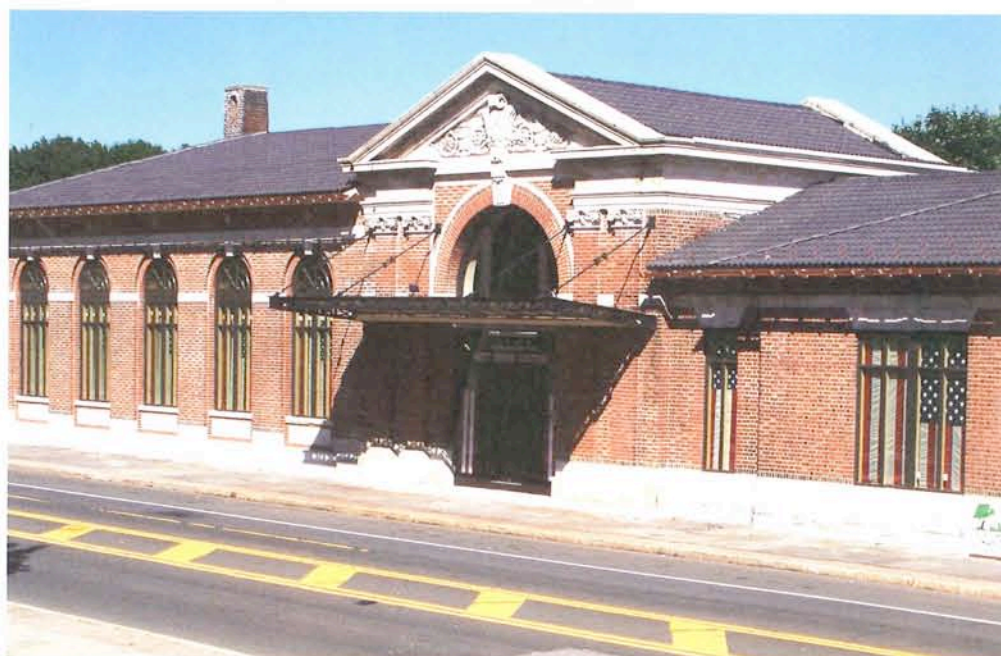
"When the trains left, people left," says Newburgh native Ray Yanonne, who purchased the skeletal remains of the station in February 2009 and began a renovation that he hopes will help rekindle commercial interest in the city. "You have the park on one side, the river on the other. There will be sidewalk dining and trains going by. You'll be able

to see down the river. There's nothing around here to compare to that," Yanonne notes.

"Shame on the city, shame on the state, shame on everybody for letting something like this disintegrate," says Nick Citera, principal with Nicholas DiBrizzi of Cosimo's Restaurant Group, noting that in his native Italy, "everything is preserved" (his cousin's house in Florence is 1100 years old). "They have to stop letting people build new when there are empty buildings. First re-adapt the empty buildings, then build new," he says. "Ray set goals for other people to aspire to. It takes your breath away."

Citera has chosen the renovated station to launch the flagship of his new concept called Pizza Shop. "We're going

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with the look of the train station—it will have a ‘retro’ feel.” Citera says. “It will never be a train station again, but it’s the next best use. Knowing there’s history here makes it that much better.”

Pizza originally put the Cosimo’s group on the culinary map, but Citera says the new shop, which he plans to open by the fall, will adapt Sicilian-style pizza for modern palates and current trends. “We’re going to recreate something we’ve done all our lives—make pizza—but Pizza Shop will be more than that,” he says, adding that the menu, still in the tasting stages, will also focus on appetizers, salads, sandwiches and a couple of pasta dishes. Thin-crust pizza will also be available, all the bread will be baked on the premises, and there will be vegetables galore. “We’ll even deliver pizza to the ferry,” he says.

Another part of the renovated station will become home to a drama workshop and playhouse that owners hope will attract local, national and international performance artists of all genres.

“We walked in and fell in love with the space,” says Jen Soloway, Executive Director of Railroad Playhouse (www.rrplayhouse.org), which she co-founded with her husband Seth. The couple, both with MFAs in Arts Management from Brooklyn College, plans a 99-seat flexible venue with a sprung wooden floor and state-of-the-art lighting and sound systems. They also hope to implement a summer arts camp for local children, teaching-artist residencies and after-school programs in local schools. “We want to be a venue for the community,” Soloway says.

The playhouse will have no permanent seating or fixed stage, and each performance will be unique. Pizza Shop’s hours and menu will enhance the playhouse experience, and the two new tenants will also team up for special events. “We know the arts bring tourists,” Citera says, “and we’ll bring people to Newburgh.”

Both Citera and Yanonne agree that in order to change the area, responsibility and contributions must come from a broad spectrum. Today, Yanonne stresses, “We don’t see anything as permanent—everybody thinks it’s disposable, it’s all temporary. There should be incentives for people to do this, so it makes financial sense.”

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