Grand plans see Hall as ‘most inspiring place on earth’

By DARRICK BOORD
Kent State University

The Professional Football Hall of Fame has big plans for the near future. The Hall, dedicated to the greats of American football past and present, is in the middle of not only the largest undertaking in its history, but one of the largest projects of any kind ever attempted in Ohio. The Johnson Controls Pro Football Hall of Fame Village is an approximately $600 million project expected to have an impact of more than $15 billion over 25 years, according to a study by Convention Sports and Leisure. First proposed in 2014, the Village consists of nine major components, including the Pro Football Hall of Fame Museum, Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium, four-star Hilton hotel and conference center, National Football and Youth Sports Complex, Main Street Hall of Fame Village, Center for Excellence, Performance Center, and more. Upon completion, the Hall of Fame Village will drive billions of dollars of impact by people who do not live or work in the city.

Neighbors want to know what’s in store for them

By DARRICK BOORD
Kent State University

Neighbors in the immediate vicinity of the Pro Football Hall of Fame and the proposed Hall of Fame Village don’t all share the same sense of excitement as much of the rest of the city and county. Two residents of Clarendon Street, just up from most of the construction and activity at the Hall, are upset at what they see as a lack of communication from officials – not just from the Hall, but from local governments and other agencies as well.

Meet the HOF Village’s key players

By Canton Repository staff
Reprinted with permission from The Repository, June 6, 2015

It’s taken a village to craft the framework for a Pro Football Hall of Fame attraction. Individuals and organizations from public and private sectors, and local and global companies, have signed on to participate in a massive overhaul of the land surrounding the Hall of Fame. Leaders have lauded it as a boon to the local economy.

So who are the prospective players with Hall of Fame Village?

THE POWERHOUSE
The 6-foot-9 president and executive director of the Pro Football Hall of Fame Village Master Plan team includes, from left, David Baker, President of the Pro Football Hall of Fame; Stuart Lichter, President and Chairman of Industrial Realty Group; Bill Krueger, Principal of Convention Sports and Leisure; and Dennis Saunier, President and CEO of the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce.

See PLAYERS, Page 3
“If you do the right things, right things will happen. When you think it’s your darkest hour, there’s light at the end of the tunnel ... When things happen and you’re up steppin, you have a responsibility, people respect that.”

-Jon Saunier, President, Johnson Controls

THE IDEA QUEST
The Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Village development began with a $500 million agreement between Johnson Controls and IdeaQuest, a regional Chamber of Commerce, who gives Hall of Fame Village leverage. IdeaQuest is a non-profit 501c3, which specializes in technology.

“I want the project down the road, 10 years from now, when people talk about it, it has to be the right thing. Everything is about doing the right thing.”

-Kim Metcalf-Kupres, Vice President of IdeaQuest, Inc.

THE JOHNSON CONTROLS HALL OF FAME VILLAGE

Theresa Lichter Baker, the president of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and her management team discussed the naming rights agreement with Johnson Controls. The agreement was made public by the Hall of Fame. The agreement included a $500 million investment from Johnson Controls to develop the Hall of Fame Village.

“The commitment the capital the agreement brings gives us the opportunity to build and expand this nation’s Hall of Fame. We’re really excited about this. It’s going to be a great opportunity to build on the success we’ve had in the past.”

-Steve Henson, President and CEO of IdeaQuest, Inc.

THEENSHRINEMENT WEEKEND

The Enshrinement Weekend is the biggest event at the Pro Football Hall of Fame. It is a time when former players and their families come together to celebrate their accomplishments. The weekend is filled with events, such as the Enshrinement Ceremony, where the new inductees are officially welcomed into the Hall of Fame.

“Enshrinement Weekend is a time when the Hall of Fame and Johnson Controls can come together and bring the community together.”

-Steve Henson, President and CEO of IdeaQuest, Inc.

THE JOHNSON CONTROLS HALL OF FAME VILLAGE

The Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Village is a $1 billion, 10-year project that will include a museum, a hotel, and a retail and entertainment complex. The project is expected to create over 1,000 jobs and generate over $1 billion in economic activity.

“Johnson Controls is an ideal partner for this project. They have a strong history of commitment and they understand the importance of giving back to the community.”

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STUART LICHTER has made a career of transforming forsaken properties into flourishing real estate.

The founder of the California-based Industrial Realty Group set his sights on the Canton area as early as 2008 with the purchase of a 200-acre industrial park. The park is now a bustling development, home to 2,000 companies and 30,000 employees. The company's success has been recognized with numerous awards, including the prestigious 2016 Fourth Quarter Award for Excellence in Real Estate Development.

The Industrial Realty Group has also been involved in numerous community projects in Canton, including the renovation of the former St. Vincent de Paul School into a center for the elderly, and the development of a new youth center. The company's commitment to the community has earned it a reputation as a leader in sustainable development.

Stuart Lichter's passion for real estate and his dedication to community service have earned him numerous accolades, including the 2017 Canton Chamber of Commerce Business Person of the Year Award.

The Industrial Realty Group continues to be a driving force in the Canton community, with ongoing projects planned for the years to come.

Photo courtesy of the Canton Chamber of Commerce.
Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium

At top is a rendering of Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium.

Above is a rendering of the enshrinement ceremony.

At left is a rendering of the stadium's Sky Level seating.

At right is a rendering of the interior of Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium.

At left is a rendering of Club Level seating at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium.

All renderings on these pages courtesy of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.
Hall of Fame hotel and more

At top is a rendering of the four-star Hilton Hall of Fame hotel exterior.

Above is a rendering of the hotel interior.

At left is a rendering of the Legends Landing player care center.

At right is a rendering of Main Street Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame hotel is visible in the background.

At left is a rendering of the Pro Football Hall of Fame Village's Center for Excellence. Part of Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium is visible at the left.
Northeast Ohio is a tough area.

People are tough, the weather is tough, and often the only kind of luck here is to have a good generator. This has been a common refrain for years in the region, especially in regards to sports teams.

The Drive. The Fumble. The Shot. Art Model. The Move (and the incredible Joe Tiller era of '97). So many other moments, so many memories, and some people believe that if we would be heroes and always - will-go beards along the way. The sports are a big deal and the big project, may have begun to have some of that tough-knuckledness.

The Cleveland Cavaliers capturing the 2016 NBA championship in the peak of many of our efforts in Canton to be more progressive. We’re one of the first cities in Ohio to legalize an open container outside.

And I think one of the things that you will see is measurable benefits that you see in downtown Cleveland. I think that, when you visit downtown, that city, their downtown is really – it’s unrecognizable since the project finished.

There can be urban successes and those Rust Belt cities can learn from each other. To keep our efforts going forward and keep doing these different types of projects, we’re really missing it. I love being a part of them.”

Allison Bussey, Bussey also said that he believes that the community has become so self-focused. He has also said that as he visits some of the neighborhoods in the area, she can also feel the passion that the members of residents – and part of that is tied to the progress being made with the Hall of Fame Village.

“For some reason we can be our own worst critics. It’s really just the way that the community have become so self-fooling,” Bussey said. “While you’re crossing the street, you’re thinking about the hotel, the city parking ground, recently that the negativity seems to look at itself, then you’re jumping on the bandwagon.”

Denny Saunier also works hard to keep the pulse of the community.

Saunier is president of the board of directors of Fame Village, work that he believes is bigger than football. It’s more about the use of its size and scope – to lift up a community, as well. The message for us looking for positive manner.”

Mack, however, says that efforts by the city of Canton and the chamber of commerce have helped to begin to change the image and perception of the area.

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Floyd Breit sold his home to the Hall, then decided to give a portion of the sale back

BY TODD PORTER

"A Nation's Promise from The Repository, Nov. 15, 2015"

David Baker's office literally sits in the shadow of Canton's Pro Football Hall of Fame Stadium. At least it used to. When the stadium cast one bake, he was one of the first to experience a change that is underway on the stadium.

As the Pro Football Hall of Fame’s capacity increased in 2012, the one thing that remained constant is the reminder of the Herdman house, the former residence of a man who once lived nearby. "I have to excuse him, from time to time, he seems preoccupied.

"I'm told that some thing happens to refuse Baker on what is really important. Such one thing happens recently.

Baker was making his way from one meeting to another at the next at the Hall when a lady, Stacie Strohmeyer and her volunteer, asked if he had a few minutes to chat.

"I was doing a meeting that took place near a donor board inside the Hall. It is a board that honors everyone who has given at least a $10,000 donation to the football museum. "Mr. Baker," Breit started to say, "I want to talk to you about the Hall of Fame recently bought my house."

"The Hall of Fame is the only one in place if they come and ask for our home."

"My husband is a retired airline pilot, Tracey Rohr, said. "We're going to need a hot water heater. Something is going to happen to refuse Baker on what is really important. Such one thing happens recently.

"The hardest part in all of this is helping the homeowners who have been affected," said Roe. "We have to help them understand what their options are. We have to talk to them about some of the homes that had already been bought. They were being sold at very good premiums, not only to what the county auditors had at that time but also what the market was offering.

"This definitely a segment where a lot of folks have been burned and they're very, very, very emotional attachment there, so that's difficult on them."

Rohr and Strohmeyer said they had other neighbors who had an interest in the project as well. "They're still there, they've taken over the neighborhood," Baker said.

"We've held a couple meetings with everyone who has given at least a $10,000 or more to do at our age?"

"Like I said, we've been holding a couple meetings with everyone who has given at least a $10,000 or more to do at our age?"

But Breit’s story is much deeper than a donation. When he was growing up in the dark, his mother was raised by a single mother, during a time when, as he said, "it wasn’t popular." Rose Breit was so proud of her son all these years.

"I had a lot of guidance from her," Breit said. "Before I went into the Navy at 27, I got my Eagle Scout award. I was the only one in my family to have had that community or single mother could do it.

"If I tell her one day our daughter would be that way, she is probably going to be proud of me. I think she is probably going to be proud of me."

Last week, Breit presented a check to Baker for $111,111. He made his donation in honor of his late wife. She died in 2012. They were married for 63 years.

"We were married when we went there and I was going to make a donation with those proceeds," Breit said. "It was only logical also, since it was a new electrical lines, they were giving this money to the Hall of Fame for the Hall of Fame.

"I’m thinking, what else is about to come here?"

"We got a fair price for our home through Palmer Travel in the Hall of Fame Vil."

"This story, while it makes Baker swell with pride to tell, also brings the world twice, once longitudinally over the two poles and once laterally around the equator.

"We've held a couple meetings with everyone who has given at least a $10,000 or more to do at our age?"

"Like I said, we've been holding a couple meetings with everyone who has given at least a $10,000 or more to do at our age?"
Officials confident Hall's history won't be harmed

By DARRICK BOORD
Kent State University

With much focus of the Hall of Fame Village being on the numbers – the cost, the economic impact – it is understandible if some people lose focus of the Hall’s primary purpose. The Pro Football Hall of Fame states its mission is to honor the heroes of the game, preserve its history, promote its values and celebrate excellence everywhere.

The enactment of a big-money project bringing attention, jobs, and more to the area – even just the prospect of new buildings and attractions – makes it easy for some to overlook that mission statement and think instead about what the future holds. While that future certainly looks exciting, it’s the history that has made the project possible.

“Everything is grounded in our mission,” said Pete Fierle, the Hall of Fame’s vice president of communications. “There are 300 players in the Hall of Fame out of about 27,000 professional football players. Our focus is on what made those 300 extraordinary. On preserving that history.”

That focus is evident to most everyone who works with the team at the Hall of Fame. There seems to be little worry that the Hall’s mission or focus will be altered by the Village project.

“I am completely confident that the integrity of what the Hall represents in not only going to be preserved but will be enhanced,” said Allyson Bussey, president of Visit Canton. Bussey said she has sat in on “hundreds” of meetings with Hall of Fame president David Baker and his team. “They open every single meeting with their mission statement, and follow that by saying that if any part of the project doesn’t coincide with the mission, it’s not going to be included. They live by the mission of the Hall and are even creating programming that will train all third-party staff, corporate professionals and even volunteers to uphold an expose the mission of the Hall throughout the Village.”

“Think Disney, but with the values of the Hall.”

Fierle also said that the programming will be a big part of what’s in store with the Village.

“So much focus is on the buildings, but we’re spending more time on what’s going on inside the buildings.”

Fierle said. “It’s about what football can teach us for life, and giving Hall of Famers a platform for life. It’s about our five core values.”

Those values, Fierle said, are commitment, integrity, courage, respect and excellence.

Canton councilman Edmond Mack sees the Village as part of a larger effort to restore the city to a place that attracts visitors from near and far – and not just to the Hall.

“For decades, the Pro Football Hall of Fame has been a part of not just the city’s history, but I think the county’s history as a whole,” said Mack, who in addition to his spot on the Hall’s board, has practiced law in the city for 10 years. “You see that when you go under 777 there on Dressler, you see it, Stark County, home of the pro football Hall of Fame, and I think that’s important. To increase that legacy, to try to build something that’s more of an experience – something that really kind of enhances it and brings more people to the area and does more to celebrate the contribution of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. I think it raises the community’s profile and confidence in what we have to offer.”

Saunier also emphasized the need to tie the events and attractions, quick to roll into the community at large, and more specifically, into the city.

“We need to emphasize the opportunities that attention brings. We’re trying to get people from the Hall of Fame to Canton. What’s the mechanism? We’re working on transportation corridors, a Market Square project with an iconic image, something to tie in to the Hall, all to complement what’s happening at the Village. We also have a sense of a plan of year-round to spur economic growth.

“We have a better job of having people in northeast Ohio realize what this means to them,” said Akron and Cleveland also will be beneficiaries of this.”

Officials all seem to agree that the Hall of Fame Village will be extremely beneficial to the community, while maintaining a focus on what makes the Hall – and the game of football – so important to so many people.

“We never lose sight of the mission,” Fierle said. “It’s been encouraging to see the community, while building this, as we go, bring football to talk about what else we have to offer. People come here because of the values and what it represents.

“This is not going to be just good or great, but truly excellent, world-class. It can’t be just very good.”

Thank you

A project of this size and scope requires so much more than the efforts of one person. First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Leslie Heaphy for her enthusiasm, guidance, patience and understanding. I would also like to thank everyone who took their time to allow me to interview them, including Pete Fierle, Edmond Mack, Scott Haws, Denny Saunier, Allyson Bussey, Todd Porter and Alison Matas, Rocio Strohmeyer and Tracey Rohr, as well as Lee Courtenay – who helped transcribe some of those interviews. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my fiancée, Amber Ashley, for her constant encouragement and patience with the hours upon hours that this project has usurped, as well as my son, Phillip, who also often had to deal with my mental absence while I was focused on this effort. While I think that covers everyone, I extend sincere apologies to anyone I may have omitted.

–Darrick Boord