

EDITORIALS

# Plans for the Richardson

## Architectural masterwork's future taking shape as a cultural portal

Renowned modern architect Toshiko Mori, designer of the beautiful Greatbatch visitors pavilion at the restored Darwin Martin House Complex, said recently that Buffalo itself is an architectural museum that includes key works by many significant architects. She's not alone in that view. In a lecture in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery auditorium a few years ago, noted architect Daniel Libeskind summed up perfectly Buffalo's treasures: "This is a city that is truly a mecca, and it's an unknown mecca . . ."

Libeskind was happy then to hear of future plans to rehabilitate the Richardson-Olmsted Complex as a key way to get to know the architecture of Richardson, Buffalo and America.

Two years later, hard work by the Richardson Center Corp. and the Richardson Center Architecture Center board are coming to fruition.

Plans developed by architectural and urban design firm Chan Krieger Steniewicz, recently unveiled for the Richardson-Olmsted Complex, envision the former psychiatric center as the gateway to Buffalo's treasures.

The architecture and visitor centers planned for the site not only will offer significant economic benefits to the area, but also showcase the Richardson-Olmsted Complex and highlight Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin Martin House in Buffalo and Graycliff in Derby as well as the full treasure trove of our region's great American architecture. Regional art attractions, including the nearby Albright-Knox Art Gallery and Burchfield Penney Art Center, also will be featured.

The former Buffalo State Hospital, a masterwork by the first of America's top three architects, is a dramatic setting for that portal. H.H. Richardson's work was augmented by a brilliant landscape designed by master landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, whose nationally significant park plan is another local treasure.

Playing on its cultural resources in recent years, Buffalo has become known among architects and heritage tourists as the place to see such American masterworks, one reason the National Trust for Historic Preservation chose the city for its 2011 annual conference.

The Richardson-Olmsted Complex, with a new visitor's center, will be worthy both in placement and architectural stature of its role as an important gateway to our region for

cultural tourists. Through public and private partnerships, the complex also will house a boutique hotel and conference center. Flexibility of use is part of the strategy for the rehabilitation.

The volunteer board of local and national members — headed by News publisher Stanford Lipsey — is reversing years of state neglect of a complex Albany allowed to fall into disrepair. To its credit, state government starting with former Gov. George Pataki and the State Legislature in his term have invested in the stabilization and turnaround efforts. Much of the facility had been crumbling from water-soaked interior walls, paint was peeling and fine details that added to the complex's unique design were being lost.

The stakes are considerable: Tourism in the Greater Niagara region, Erie and Niagara counties, is more than a \$2 billion business and, significantly, more than 45,000 people have jobs in this area because of that tourism.

### VIDEO LINK

For a rare look inside a local cultural treasure, visit <http://video.buffalonews.com>

The three jewels in Buffalo's architectural crown — the Richardson complex, Louis Sullivan's Guaranty Building now fostered and maintained by the law firm Hodgson Russ and the Darwin Martin House Complex, the largest and costliest restoration of any Frank Lloyd Wright building in the world — are buildings that have drawn visitors from around the world. Burnished, those jewels will increase Buffalo's tourism luster, and realize their full potential as cultural attractions.

And it will draw visitors to other important works by such key architects as Eliel and Eero Saarinen (Kleinhans Music Hall), Daniel H. Burnham (Ellicott Square), Louise Bethune (Lafayette Hotel), Sanford White (the Butler Mansion) E.B. Green and partners (Albright-Knox Art Gallery and numerous homes), Gordon Bunschaft (Albright-Knox addition) and others, a collection that soon will be augmented with completion of an award-winning federal courthouse design.

Rehabilitation of Richardson's iconic twin-towered hospital complex and the surrounding Olmsted landscape will be a major step in cementing that architectural reputation through responsible local and state stewardship.