

It's wrong to name building after owners who let old Syracuse brewery fall apart, stuck city with huge tax bill

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By



This building, known most recently as the Otisca Building, was torn down earlier this year. A new commercial/residential building is planned on the site.

David Lassman/The Post-Standard, file photo, 2012

Something sticks in my craw.

I've reread my colleague Rick Moriarty's story about the new building proposed to rise on the site of old Ryan brewery in the 500 block of Butternut Street in Syracuse.

Rick explained that Housing Visions, the reputable local, not-for-profit developer, plans to build a three-story commercial and apartment building on the lot. The old building was demolished this summer.

The new structure's [apartments](#), he said, would be reserved for some 20 low-income tenants, filling a "tremendous need" for [affordable housing](#) in the

North Side neighborhood.

One thing jumped out at me in Rick's recital: the proposed name for the development.

Housing Visions wants to call it "Otisca Commons."

To me, that's a lousy name.

When the building was demolished, it was one of the last of the original Syracuse brewery sites still standing in our town. Recently, it's been an eyesore in the district, sure, but at one time, this was a structure we would have been campaigning to give it landmark status.

The building went up as a brewery in 1865. Yes, it didn't wear the years well.



This is an artist's rendering on what a proposed commercial/residential building will look like in the

500 block of Butternut Street in Syracuse.

Who was responsible for that?

The last recorded owner, the Otisca Co. took over the place in 1979 to make fuel from coal slurry. Grand idea? Likely not. Otisca went out of business 10 years later. Earlier this year, Paul Driscoll, the city's commissioner of neighborhood and business development, told me Otisca existed only on paper.

Let's face it, we let the building fall down. It was a mess; a toxic waste site that required thousands of dollars to clean up. Not only that, Otisca ran out on \$577,000 in [back taxes!](#)

This was a mighty street for Syracuse's beer-makers back then. Thomas Ryan made his brew across the street from another of the city's premier brewers, the Haberle Co., maker of Congress Beer. Ryan's went under in 1924, Haberle in 1962. Haberle was torn down years ago; a shopping plaza is now on that location.

At one time, the reputation of Ryan's was enhanced by a huge [electrical sign](#) on the roof that featured electric bubbles. Haberle's sported an oversized figure of Gambrinus, king of brewing. (It's now at Onondaga Historical Association's museum.)

Not only that, Thomas Ryan was a mayor of Syracuse, in 1883, 1884 and 1885.

The folks at Housing Visions can do better than "Otisca Commons." Ryan Commons or Ryan Plaza sound nice. The project has a tentative starting date of next summer. It's not too late.

[Ronald McDonald](#) House



This is the new Ronald McDonald House at 1100 E. Genesee St., Syracuse.

Ronald McDonald House opened the doors in its new East Genesee Street digs with an open house Nov. 20.

The new home for families of hospitalized children has doubled the space of the old local location at Genesee and South Crouse Avenue. It's been promised since 2004.

The McDonald House of 2012 is five stories high and fits into the neighborhood of historic homes like an elephant tethered to a parking meter.

It's wonderful to have such a grand facility.

But for me, the early criticism that the new building is out of proportion to its surroundings

Ellen Blalock/The Post-Standard

sticks. I would have expected something more, well, homey.

Officers of the non-profit cooperation that runs the house defended it through the long battle with preservationists about tearing down an historic house at 1100 East Genesee St. to clear the lot for

the expansion. They said it would have been financially unwise to expand the facility on the old site, two joined houses that are to be sold and Ronald McDonald needed more room.

The house that was torn down was the Kingsley-True home, was built by Hiram Kingsley, a wholesale food merchant, in the 1860s. In 1886, the building was brought by Ransom True, an insurance broker and Civil War hero. The Trues lived there 50 years.

Parks guardian

The Syracuse Parks Conservancy this month presents its annual Guardian Award to two individuals whose "exceptional commitment, vision, leadership and dedication" helped transform and beautify parks in Syracuse.

The conservancy is an umbrella group of all city parks.

Information on the award and nominations should go to conservancy president Mike Behnke at 374-7634 or syracuseparks@aol.com.

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