

WATERLOO HAS NOT MET ITS “WATERLOO”

By Jeannie Emser Schultz

In 2007, *The Plain Dealer* headline read: “Can Waterloo Rd. Be Cleveland’s Next Tremont?” Six years later that area of Collinwood has yet to enjoy the gentrification of a Tremont or Ohio City, but ambitious plans, currently in the works, may promise a phoenix-like future.

First a bit of history: a half century ago, Collinwood was home to Irish and Eastern European immigrants who worked in the nearby railroad yard. Waterloo became a tough ethnic street, boasting “a mix of real rogues and characters,” according to Cleveland Councilman Mike Polensek. But as second and third generations moved away, the area—like so many urban neighborhoods—changed, and not for the better.

If the Waterloo Arts and Entertainment District had a godmother, it would be Cindy Barber who, along with partner Mark Leddy, took a chance in 2000 to premiere their Beachland Ballroom & Tavern in an area considered “iffy”. But the bands came as did sold out audiences. A former journalist, Barber was adept in garnering media coverage for her venue, which, in turn, focused the spotlight on the neighborhood.

Today The Beachland has earned a must-play reputation among music industry insiders. Its success and foot traffic soon attracted other businesses...a record shop, café, boutique, gallery. Enter Arts Collinwood, a non-profit gallery and arts education center providing cultural activities for all ages. Instituting the annual eclectic Waterloo Arts Street Festival (which celebrated #11 on June 29), it attracts 5000-plus attendees. The area’s continued strength as an arts district will ultimately make it more attractive, not only to small business, but potential homebuyers. And, like Tremont or Ohio City, it creates a larger sense of community.

To Barber’s Waterloo “godmother,” add über adman Alan Glazen as “godfather” and driving force behind the neighborhood’s Project Light Switch, which has assembled a coalition of business owners. Glazen, with husband-wife business partners Randy Kelly and Linda Syrek, have acquired three properties, turning a family restaurant into Chloe’s Kitchen Diner (soon to undergo an interior facelift), renovating the Harbor Pub and operating the historic Slovenian Workman’s Bar and bocce arena (to become Waterloo The Tavern). (Glazen has an affinity for the area as his father was a longtime Collinwood resident.)

Already on the horizon for the former Waterloo KeyBank Building is a restaurant/entertainment destination. Crop Rocks and The Vinyl Vault, brainchild of Crop Bistro & Bar owner Steve Schimoler and former Rock Hall CEO (and former Bratenahl resident) Terry Stewart, will include dining, a cooking school and perhaps the nation’s largest library of musical recordings on vinyl. Also

coming is Brick (cooperative ceramics studio) and Praxis (fiber art discipline workshop/classes).

Work is expected to begin after some sorely needed streetscape, structural and cosmetic improvements and parking concerns are addressed. (At the Festival, we ran into Alan Glazen who noted that they hope to have these new businesses open by April.)

At the Beachland, Barber has also added a larger summer patio, and instituted a great Sunday Brunch (see menus as well as upcoming acts at beachlandballroom.com). She is also working to create a nearby space that will showcase musical instruments for local makers to sell.

At the far west end of the road, Jackie Chen's Chinese eatery has operated for several years, and, premiering earlier this spring, Blitz BBQ opened across from The Beachland, Adding another ethnic flair to the Collinwood complex is the Callaloo Café. The intimate Callaloo is named after the traditional Trinidadian dish...slang for "a mixture of things"...an apt description for Waterloo Road itself. The day we dropped in for lunch, Callaloo's Trinidadian owner, the affable Kelvin Cadiz, was giving a lesson on expensive chrome-plated steel drums, lending a wonderful island vibe. (Free steel drum lessons are available on Tues., Thurs. & Sat., and live music on select nights.)

Other veteran Waterloo stops include sausage shops: Raddell's and R & D Sausage Company. R&D owners Joe and Carol Zuzak have been offering a variety of smoked meats and sausages for over 26 years. They also sell local organic eggs (which Joe adds, "Many Bratenahl residents order in advance."). Just walking into R&D's or Raddell's and being hit with that delicious smoky aroma dares you to not leave without a few links of homemade, old-world sausages. At Raddell's, choose from Croatian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Slovenian and Polish sausages, meats, pierogies, frozen doboosh tarts and imported food and spices.

And although Waterloo has "come a long way, baby," Collinwood business owners admit there's still plenty of room for improvement. (We noticed the crumbling sidewalks from our previous visit were finally patched along the main drag in time for the recent Festival. Our wish list would include walkway pavers, perhaps some aesthetic streetlamps and façade sprucing, plus expanded outdoor beverage/dining opportunities.)

So far \$5 million has been committed to the area for structural, cosmetic and pedestrian-friendly changes. Cindy Barber would like to see a boutique hotel or hostel in the plan, an idea Glazen also embraces. What Barber *doesn't* want is for Waterloo to become a restaurant-only destination (even though chefs like Michael Symon and Rocco Whalen have also indicated interest to follow Schimoler's lead in the district.)

With the backing of these new investors, plus veteran promoters like Barber, Arts Collinwood and Northeast Shores, a renaissance has begun that was unthinkable 10 years ago. "Today," Ward 11 Councilman Polensek states, "this is a neighborhood that's going to become a destination!"