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Rebuilding a Downtown Landmark

Jim Berlin's vision for Union Station goes beyond the offices of Logistics Plus, the shipping business he headquartered on the third floor. The one-time trucker hopes to open a 10,000-square-foot rail museum, putting Erie back on the nation's transportation map.

"My son says this place is off the cool charts," Berlin says. "And he's right. They don't build them like this anymore."

The train station opened in 1927, with intricate brickwork and terrazzo floors. But much of it was ignored for the 25 years before Berlin moved his business in. A microbrewery followed behind him. A Middle Eastern-themed hookah cafe came next.

Erie kept making trains. The General Electric locomotive plant is the county's largest employer.

Berlin pitches that with the history. "Every rail fan should have to come here once before he dies," he says, shouting over the clack-clack of one of the 70 daily freights that still clatter through. — RF



Union Station today

COURTESY OF THE ERIE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA



Union Station circa 1927

Following Trends

Four lakefront homes sold for \$1 million or more in 2006 in Erie.

"We've been discovered," says Sue Sutto, a leading Erie real estate agent.

Affordability remains a central theme in Erie real estate. Beautiful early-century homes can be found for well under \$100,000. Ten-year tax breaks are in place for those wanting to renovate or build homes inside the city.

Erie Redevelopment Authority Executive Director John Elliott believes the tax breaks and the affordability of Erie real estate make this the right time for investors to turn long-empty second- and third-floor, century-old downtown buildings into lofts and condominiums. Studies showed him that young Erie professionals and empty-nesters want more opportunities to live downtown — the same place where they work and play. So Elliott made sure downtown living was a priority when a master plan was developed in 2006. The plan includes bayfront condos and a new urban neighborhood, including townhomes and lofts.

"There's a new version of the American dream for young people," Elliott says. "They want to live within walking distance of work, restaurants and bars, and church. They can find that downtown." — KR



The renovated Modern Tool Square