

Erie's "Crown Jewel" Earns National Brownfields Award

From the shores of Presque Isle to the Historic Brig Niagara and Erie Maritime Museum, Erie's scenic waterfront truly is the crown jewel of the community and the region.

— Tom Ridge
former
Governor

The Erie Front Street Complex took home the highest honor at the Phoenix Awards ceremony held on September 26 at the 2001 National Brownfields Conference in Chicago, Ill.

The Phoenix Awards recognize innovative yet practical brownfield remediation projects that bring blighted, old commercial and industrial sites back to productive use. A panel of judges representing both private industry and government selected the Erie Front Street Complex from entries submitted from across the country.

Charles Bartsch, a senior policy analyst for the Northeast-Midwest Institute and a Phoenix Awards judge, commented that the Erie Front Street Complex project was worthy of the Phoenix Awards Grand Prize because it exemplifies brownfield success in so many ways. "It showed that a community dedicated to brownfield reuse could take on a very old, long-contaminated property with significant site challenges — and make the reuse process work. It spawned a series of innovative and effective public-private partnerships, which all focused on successful revitalization of the site. The final effort brought benefits to a whole host of Erie stakeholders, from local residents able to take advantage of the recreational and cultural aspects of the project, to local merchants and service providers able to capitalize on the competitive advantages of the new development."

For more than 80 years, the 118-megawatt coal-fired power plant at GPU Energy's Front Street Station generated electricity to serve downtown Erie. Today, the former Front Street Station is now Bayfront Centre, a \$117 million mixed-use development including a maritime museum — featuring exhibits on the environmental transformation of the Great Lakes ecosystem — marina, public library, hotel and commercial and residential areas.

"It is a tremendous honor to be the recipient of such a prestigious award," Charles Mowbray, director of GPU's Environmental Affairs, said. "When we started this project our main intentions were to revitalize our community and **create jobs** for our citizens. This 2001 Phoenix Award Grand Prize shows us that our hard work did not go unnoticed."

Cleaning the Slate

In 1989, when the power plant reached the end of its economic vitality, GPU began planning the facility's closure. The 11-acre site contained a power plant, an electric substation, a 120-foot smokestack, fuel tanks, ash dewatering ponds and various other ancillary facilities that left behind a variety of environmental contaminants, including unburned coal, asbestos, heavy metals and an oil spill. The projected cost of decommissioning the plant and restoring the site to a greenfield condition totaled millions of dollars.

Following a study conducted jointly by GPU and North American Realty Advisory Services of New York City, GPU determined that redeveloping the site would offset the cost of station demolition and site remediation. Facing Lake Erie's Presque Isle Bay, the largest naturally sheltered bay on the Great Lakes, the site occupied an attractive **waterfront location** with proximity to downtown.



Erie's waterfront revitalization is anchored by the Erie Maritime Museum, preserving the region's rich maritime history.

In 1991, GPU began working with DEP to address the environmental issues at the site. Much of the cleanup work coincided with the launch of Pennsylvania's Land Recycling Program, also known as Act 2, and the Front Street Station remediation became one of the first sites cleaned up under the new program. The Land Recycling Program's **realistic standards** made the cleanup and redevelopment of the site feasible and affordable for GPU.

"The flexibility of the Land Recycling Program provided a nice change from the old 'cleanup to pristine conditions' policy of the past," Mowbray said.



One for the books. The Erie County Public Library and Civic Auditorium are just two of the new Bayfront Centre's main attractions.

Cleanup of the Front Street Station was completed in May 1998, and thanks to community support and **financial assistance** from a variety of partners, including the City of Erie, the Erie Port Authority and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Erie's waterfront revitalization plans are well underway.

Smooth Sailing to Redevelopment

In June 2001, former Gov. Ridge applauded the turnaround taking place in Erie: "From the shores of Presque Isle to the Historic Brig Niagara and Erie Maritime Museum, Erie's scenic waterfront truly is the crown jewel of the community and the region."

GPU Energy, together with city and county government, state agencies, business leaders and the community indeed have created a crown jewel for this region — a cultural center for Erie, a destination point for millions of tourists, a new residential community and improved waterfront access. Hundreds of professional and non-professional jobs have been created with **highway and infrastructure improvements** totaling more than \$95 million dollars, and many hundreds more are on the way as the entire site is developed and becomes operational.

Bayfront Centre's potential is clear: The 92,000 square-foot Erie Maritime Museum vividly illustrates the region's rich maritime heritage. The Erie County Public Library attracts more than 4,000 visitors a day. The 8.5-acre Liberty Park offers walking and biking trails, playgrounds and a 150-seat

dockside amphitheater — all with a breathtaking view of Presque Isle. And, the U.S. Brig Niagara, an authentic replica of the U.S. warship aboard which Commodore Perry won the Battle of Lake Erie in the War of 1812, rests majestically in its berth facing the museum, adding to the splendor of Erie's waterfront revitalization.

Developers Nick Scott and Greg Rubino are exploring plans for a convention center, a restaurant and lakeside condominiums for the remainder of the site. "With the Land Recycling Program's liability relief, we can do almost anything with the property," Rubino said.



Mark Schweiker,
Governor

David E. Hess,
Secretary

Department of
Environmental
Protection

www.dep.state.pa.us
(directLINK "Land Recycling")

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A web space dedicated to helping you learn how to protect and improve the environment. The site features the largest collection of environmental videos available on the Internet and is produced by the nonprofit Environmental Fund for Pennsylvania, with financial support from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, 877-PA-GREEN.



For more information about **Bayfront Centre** contact DEP's Northwest Regional Office at (814) 332-6648.