



Gala-Vanting by Faye Zuckerman



Party on track at locomotive factory

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Oliver Bennett, left, president of the Providence Preservation Society, Bill Struever, CEO of Struever Bros. Eccles and Rouse based in Baltimore, and Vicki Veh, interim executive director of the society, enjoy the fundraiser on Feb. 9.

PPS / David Simione

The renovated building that hosted the Providence Preservation Society's 5th Annual Winter Bash Feb. 9 was so long and narrow it almost seemed like a station where a train might pull in at any moment. That was appropriate enough, considering that in 1901 it was the home of the American Locomotive Company, the second largest builder of steam locomotives in the country.

No trains were in sight last Saturday, and guests at the urban party strolled up and down the spacious structure in a sort of European fashion, as though they were on the Champs Élysées, noted one guest. They stopped to chat with friends and admire the work done by Struever Brothers, Eccles & Rouse, the Baltimore company which is redeveloping the ALCO project on Valley Street in the Olneyville neighborhood. Outdoors, guests were welcomed to the site by ALCO's dynamic new blue neon sign.

Martha Werenfels, whose architectural firm Durkee, Brown, Viveiros & Werenfels is working on the project, attended with her husband, Frank Satterthwaite, and they were eyeing a black-and-white Audrey

Hepburn film being shown in a lounge area of the space. Werenfels pointed out of the dark window at a courtyard, which she said was once part of a race track when an expensive French race car was made at the complex.

The race track is now a walking path surrounding one building and running along the Woonasquatucket River, where she envisions employees strolling on their lunch hour.

“This is the kind of project that helps us understand what our future can be,” she said, “not industrial, but the new future.” The complex, on an 18.5-acre site, is expected to have offices, retailers, restaurants and residences occupying 2.3 million square feet.

This annual preservation party is designed to attract all ages, and the invitation urged guests to wear anything from ball gowns to jeans. Victoria Veh, the society’s interim director, was happy that the 850 guests (who raised about \$40,000) seemed comfortable there, from longtime preservation supporters such as Henry and Peggy Sharpe of North Kingstown and Barry and Becky Preston of Providence to a raft of twenty-somethings curious about what was happening to the capital city.

Violet Dancheck, a graduate student at Brown University, said she was alerted to the party by a notice on the school’s list-serve. She is from Maryland, where the Streuver Bros. is headquartered, and she said the event “sounded cool.” She brought along Michael Krushinsky, a teacher at the Providence high schools known as The Met, who was a stand-out in a beige everyday-type kilt from the Utilikilt Company based in Seattle. He said he was impressed that the city was able to revitalize itself “without removing the structures that provide its history.” They were joined by sculptor Gillian Christy, who has a studio nearby in The Steel Yard complex.

As the band The Cusacks rocked in the background and partygoers danced, Veh was careful to point out that ALCO is “a perfect example of how historic tax credits stimulate development.” The tax credits, like all state expenditures, are being considered for cutbacks. “Bill [Struever, CEO of the development company] could have taken his dollars anywhere. But because of that, he came here.”

— PAM THOMAS