

SATURDAY FORUM



Tribune file photo (2001)

Having outlasted a bygone era in transportation, the restored Union Station must have new, 21st-century purposes.

Bring Union Station Back To Life

All is quiet at 601 N. Nebraska Ave. It's a Thursday morning, and I've come to Tampa Union Station to see what has become of it since I last took the train in 1997 — before the building's restoration began.

Where I expect to find a flock of travelers in full hustle-bustle, I find one ticketing agent, a genial security guard and a couple of people who look a bit confused. While I listen for that unmistakable whistle or the mighty engine roar that announces the train's arrival, I hear nothing.

No clinking of heels or rolling of luggage wheels on the terrazzo floors. No echoes of voices.

Instead, there remains the sort of silence that holds sway in libraries. I feel the pressure to stay quiet myself.

By now, I feel a little sad. Where are all the people that this jewel of a building deserves? Have I just come at the wrong time?

It seems hard to imagine that this



Tribune file photo (2002)

Visitors enter the waiting room and ticket area through the arched doorways of the main building.



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now-sleepy station used to be a nerve center of the city. Lying at the eastern edge of downtown's business district, with Ybor City a stone's throw away and the Port of Tampa to the south, Union Station once helped shape this city. The depot, built in 1912, saw many of its trains bring in the Cuban tobacco essential to Ybor's cigar makers.

And before the end of World War II, the car most visitors arrived in to see the city of the cigar was a Pullman.

But autos and airplanes are the mode of choice for most Tampa travelers these days. Each day only two trains chug into Tampa Union: train 91 from New York to Miami and train 92 from Miami to New York. Both are called the Silver Star.

By early afternoon a small crowd accumulates, waiting for train 91 to pull in. Finally, noise fills the station up to its coffered ceiling.

The station stays peopled, but not packed, for a few hours. Somewhere between 100 and 135 travelers pass through it each day — hardly a staggering number.

Figures like these attest to the dwindling loyalty travelers have for the train. But they reveal no truth about the power and character of the station itself.

The building is tapestry brick and remains one of Tampa's few designed in the Italian Renaissance revival style. Great, round-arched windows make the inside of the station a corridor of light.

To step inside the place is to respond to it, and it takes no architectural expertise to do so. The station speaks such nostalgia, it is easy to imagine what it was like for passengers of long ago who said goodbye to those they loved here. Some travelers surely departed feeling lonesome. Others, ready to head for the old smoking car to play a few hands of poker or pinochle.

Given the chance, the station has stories to tell. It lends Tampa a sense of place that condominiums and shopping centers that sprout up overnight cannot. Union Station stands with the Cuban Club, the Italian Club, the University of Tampa and other landmarks in stout opposition to city makeovers that so often leave a place bland in trying to appeal to the "universal."

The station's restoration is a great beginning. Now it must have people to breathe life into it. And if train travel alone is not enough to bring people to it, maybe there is another way.

One recent inspired plan involved providing the unused space of the restored baggage annex to a group of local artists, rent-free. The station is now even more distinct to Tampa. Travelers headed to Miami from New York might get to see a bit of local artwork they would have otherwise missed. And gallery fans might consider train travel.

Perhaps a local merchant could come too — a small bookstore, a good food vendor — who knows?

It has been said, "If you build it, they will come." Could the same apply to the restoration of a place? Perhaps one could add, "If you put it to good use, they will keep coming back." And if people keep coming back, then Tampa Union Station will not go the way of many present-day ghost stations with their skeleton tracks. Instead, it could be just beginning to wake from a long sleep.



Keyword: Community Columnists, to read other recent columns.

Puzzles Make Me

By DAVID GRIMES
Sarasota Herald-Tribune

Because I have no life, I recently started doing crossword puzzles.

The rewards came almost immediately; I still have no life, but now I am also vexed, humiliated, depressed, ashamed and, most often of all, stumped.

The humiliation part came because as a "word guy," I thought

crossword puzzles would be a snap. For example, thanks to my rapidly deteriorating body, I can bandy about such words as "psoriasis" and "hemorrhoid" with reckless abandon. Unfortunately, I have yet to see either

word crop up in a crossword. Instead, I am confronted by such clues as "pismire," which means an ant, not an overturned latrine, as I originally thought, and "pansophic" which means "wise," which clearly I am not.

The depressed part came when I read that a fellow by the name of David Rosen, who should be repeatedly and soundly smacked, can solve the Sunday New York Times crossword puzzle in 12 minutes. It takes me that long to fold the paper and find a pencil.

(Because my eyesight is not so good either, I am one of those doomed souls who do crossword puzzles in pen. This means when "Couturier Cassini" turns out to be "Oleg," not "Olag" and "angry" turns out to be "sore," not "fume," whole sections of the puzzle are transformed into dense, unintelligi-

I don't know how you'd know that "pismire" means "ant" unless you'd seen the clue before.

ble globs of ink. "Having a little across, are we?" tically ask while shoulder.

"Not at all, I'm something wrong." "So it's the per" "that you wrote" "swer to 'Bakery' v" "really 'breads'?" "S"

Wh matte adam using line s "crut" direct such a figure clue.

know how you'd mire" means "an seen the clue before word in the dictionary typically used fast conversation

"Honey, there mire strolling about Lucky Charms."

"Are you talking Proxmire, the former Wisconsin? What cereal?"

"No, dear. Pismic word for ant before formic acid discharge." "Didn't he take McCarthy's seat in 1957?"

And, while we're Western Samoan "tala."

I just thought y

Me, A Dubious Sort

I am going to accept the back-handed compliment in "Even Joe Redner Is Right Sometimes" (Our Opinion, Aug. 15).



JOE REDNER

But I take umbrage with the sentence in your editorial, "But even such adubious sort" — speaking of me — "can take a stand worth applauding." This is a statement about my character without any substantiation. This statement labels me a "dubious sort" and suggests I don't take other stands worth applauding.

Where does the editorial board get the nerve to call me "dubious"? Based on what?

One might think I was guilty of one of the real sins of the world — lying, cheating and stealing. Because I know the Tribune editor could never come to the conclusion that I lie, cheat or steal based on any credible information that they have. I know what they mean when they use the term "dubious sort." They are talking about judging people based on how they like to have sex.

For your information, let me give you some applaudable stands you might have taken notice of if you would put your religious biases

aside. That's exactly your need to control sex lives.

Why wasn't this thing when I took fundamental right to so-called "free speech" the free speech right through public access the county tried to constitutionally), rights of property, ernment abuse and I honestly believe stand)? How about for the rights of minorities?

When I run for taking a stand against and politicians who our way of life. We commission stand people who already li developers?

Your editorial challenge and win when it is just one ries of stands for rights and justice sort."

Joe Redner operates ment businesses in

If You Want To Understand Scientology, Just Ask

It is baffling why the Tribune chose to reprint a muddled account of

Scientology is a practical religion. It contains effective

waters — reducing crime, restoring understanding and fostering peace.