

# Village Voice



## A look at the Hall of Fame Village and what it means to the community

Free

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Image courtesy of Pro Football Hall of Fame

A rendering of the proposed Johnson Controls Pro Football Hall of Fame Village.

## Grand plans see Hall as ‘most inspiring place on earth’

By **DARRICK BOORD**  
Kent State University

The Professional Football Hall of Fame has big plans for the near future.

The Hall, dedicated to the greats of American football past and pres-

ent, is in the middle of not only the largest undertaking in its history, but one of the largest projects of any kind ever attempted in Ohio. The Johnson Controls Pro Football Hall of Fame Village is an approximately \$600 million project

expected to have an impact of more than \$15 billion over 25 years, according to a study by Convention Sports and Leisure. First proposed in 2014, the Village consists of nine major components, including the Pro Football Hall of Fame Mu-

seum, Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium, four-star Hilton hotel and conference center, National Football and Youth Sports Complex, Main Street Hall of Fame Village, Center for Excellence, Performance

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### Village to have huge economic impact

By **DARRICK BOORD**  
Kent State University

The Johnson Controls Pro Football Hall of Fame Village is anticipated to have a tremendous economic impact not only on Canton, but on all of Stark County and the Northeast Ohio region.

“I think that is a the most influential development in decades in our region,” said Allyson Bussey, president of Visit Canton – formerly the Stark County Convention and Visitor’s Bureau. “When is the last time someone has invested over \$600 million into anything? Upon completion, the Hall of Fame Village will drive billions of dollars of impact by people who do not live or work

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## Neighbors want to know what’s in store for them

By **DARRICK BOORD**  
Kent State University

Neighbors in the immediate vicinity of the Pro Football Hall of Fame and the proposed Hall of Fame village don’t all share the same sense of

excitement as much of the rest of the city and county.

Two residents of Clarendon Street, just up from most of the construction and activity at the Hall, are upset at what they see as a lack of communica-

tion from officials – not just from the Hall, but from local governments and other agencies as well.

“They’re not being up front with us,” said Rocio Strohmeyer. “I mean,

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## Meet the HOF Village’s key players

By **Canton Repository staff**  
Reprinted with permission  
from *The Repository*, June 6, 2015

It’s taken a village to craft the framework for a Pro Football Hall of Fame attraction.

Individuals and organizations from public and private sectors, and local and global companies, have signed on to participate in a massive overhaul of the land surrounding the Hall of Fame. Leaders have lauded it as a boon to the local economy.

So who are the prospective players with Hall of Fame Village?

### THE POWERHOUSE

The 6-foot-9 president and executive director of the Pro Football Hall of



Photo courtesy of Pro Football Hall of Fame

The Hall of Fame Village Master Plan team includes, from left, David Baker, President of the Pro Football Hall of Fame; Stuart Lichter, President and Chairman of Industrial Realty Group; Bill Krueger, Principal of Convention Sports and Leisure; and Dennis Saunier, President and CEO of the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce.

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# Naming rights deal shows value of values

By **TODD PORTER**  
*Reprinted with permission from The Repository, Nov, 20, 2016*

CANTON — On Aug. 10, the temperature in Stark County ticked above 90 degrees. It was humid, too, as David Baker waited to board a private jet sent to Akron-Canton Airport. It was a flight that could make a big difference for the Hall of Fame Village development.

At 6-foot-9 and nearly 400 pounds, Baker, the president of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, wasn’t feeling the heat — literally or figuratively. He was, however, facing his first real crisis as the Hall’s leader. His past, present and future met at a crossroads as the corporate jet, sent by Johnson Controls, taxied down the runway.

Three days earlier, Baker had stood before a national television audience and announced the cancellation of the Hall of Fame Game. A mistake in field-paint preparation caused the turf to be ruled unplayable.

As media outlets from Canton to New York focused on the previous two days, Baker’s attention, as he stood on the tarmac waiting for the plane, was on the future of Hall of Fame Village, a nearly \$600 million development that could reshape the economic landscape of Stark County.

Baker and Stuart Lichter, president and chairman of Industrial Realty Group, were about to fly to Wisconsin for one of the most important meetings of their professional careers. The Hall of Fame and IRG formed a development partnership that has become Hall of Fame Village.

They were heading to Milwaukee for an initial meeting with Johnson Controls CEO Alex Molinaroli and his management team to discuss a naming-rights agreement with Hall of Fame Village. Eventually, the company signed an 18-year naming rights and servicing contract that will bring in excess of \$100 million to what is now known as Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Village.

In exchange, Johnson Controls gets a national platform to introduce itself to mainstream customers. Additionally, its name is attached to Enshrinement Weekend powered by Johnson Controls and Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Experience, a \$120 million virtual-reality amusement park.

“It’s one of those deal where one plus one equals 10 because of what it does for them, what they do for us and what the two brands do together,” Baker said.

As part of the agreement, Johnson Controls, which specializes in building-efficiency technologies, will construct the first “smart city” sports and entertainment complex. Then the company will use the facilities here as a showcase to bring in potential clients to show off the latest technology.

The capital the agreement brings gives Hall of Fame Village leverage.

“It moves the project down the track a great distance,” said Dennis Saunier, CEO of the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, who has been actively involved since the inception of Hall of Fame Village. “This is the type of outside interest and capital and commitment over 18 years that ensures things are moving in the right direction, and it’s sustainable. A company like Johnson Controls has a responsibility to their shareholders to make the right decisions. I’m sure they thought aligning themselves with the Pro Football Hall of Fame was an opportunity like none they have experienced to date.”

It is the kind of capital infusion into the nearly \$600 million Hall of

## A behind-the-scenes look at how Hall of Fame Village and Johnson Controls came together

Fame Village project, a mixed-used sports entertainment facility with nine components, that could ensure dreams become reality. Baker and Lichter have long said the project would need outside capital. They scored their biggest win to date in Milwaukee on a hot summer day.

“We started thinking about naming rights probably eight months ago,” Baker said.

**HOW IT CAME TOGETHER**

The Hall of Fame retained the representation of Premier Ventures to seek a naming-rights partner. Jeff Marks, president and co-founder of Premier, visited Canton in August for this year’s enshrinement.

Marks’ company was retained to find like-minded partners with the Hall of Fame. The perfect partner was located 480 miles away, about halfway up the west coast of Lake Michigan.

Eric Bechtel is founder and president of IdeaQuest, a company similar to Premier. Johnson Controls retained IdeaQuest because it was interested in expanding its brand marketing beyond business-to-business consumers.

Baker and Bechtel are not strangers. When Baker was commissioner of the Arena Football League, he formed several agreements with Bechtel’s help.

“Eric is a good friend of mine,” Baker said last week. “Johnson Controls is this 131-year-old company, and people recognize it as a distinguished brand, but (people) don’t necessarily know what they do. There was a lot of little things coming together.”

Johnson Controls might be the biggest company you’ve never heard of.

“We’re trying to change that,” said Kim Metcalf-Kupres, vice president and chief marketing officer for Johnson Controls.

But still, before the first meeting, many thoughts raced through Baker’s mind.

“I don’t know how much that game cancellation is going to cost us,” Baker said, choosing his words carefully as a class-action lawsuit is pending from a California attorney who has a history of going after the NFL. “I know it will be very expensive. I do think we did the right thing. We respected player safety. We hate to disappoint fans, and we’re trying very hard to make it right for fans. I felt like we ... did the right thing. Sometimes, the right thing is hard.”

**CANCELING THE GAME**

When Baker met Molinaroli, he began to explain the Hall’s mission statement. Before he could finish, Molinaroli interrupted.

“I’m a CEO and I make tough decisions and costly decisions. You made the right decision on Sunday night,” the CEO of Johnson Controls said.

As it turned out, canceling the Hall of Fame Game didn’t hurt the chances of Hall of Fame Village landing a nine-figure partnership with a \$40 billion-a-year global

company. It enhanced it.

“It’s karma,” said Saunier, who is good friends with Baker. “If you do the right things, right things will happen. When you think it’s your darkest hour, there’s light at the end of the tunnel. I think it shows when things happen and you’re man enough to step up and take responsibility, people respect that.”

Johnson Controls is a contracting company whose reputation is only as good as the integrity behind the work it produces.

“Deeply ingrained in our culture is the measure of a person’s character, and their integrity is not seen in the best of times, it’s measured at the worst of times,” Metcalf-Kupres said. “It’s how we deal with tough challenges and tough decisions and how we manage relationships and expectations and make choices around the right things. That defines the measure of the people we work with and the opportunities we pursue.”

“That set off the right tone that we were dealing with a wonderful company,” Lichter said.

“The way David and his team handled that situation — it was an unfortunate situation and there’s nothing good about it other than they made the right call and put players’ safety ahead of everything — certainly it wasn’t a popular decision,” Metcalf-Kupres said. “They took hits. You’re not going to make everyone happy.”

No one knew that in the days after the Hall of Fame Game more than Baker, who took plenty of hits.

“When we talk about integrity, that’s doing the right thing when it’s hard or costly,” Baker said.

“When I went there, I was excited to see someone else who recognized and embraced that. That’s the kind of partner you want. I went there not expecting much. I came back enormously impressed.

“I know people have heard me speak of those values a lot. Those values that I learned from sports mean a lot to me, not because of my successes, but when I was on my butt, sometimes because of mistakes of my own choosing. That’s when you learn what those values mean and how important they are.”

Baker and Lichter left that first meeting — a session that lasted more than four hours — buoyed by the feedback. Perhaps for the first time since the game that previous Sunday night, Baker had a sense that everything was going to be all right.

Molinaroli, whose company ranked 70th on the latest Fortune 500 list with about 140,000 global employees, was scheduled to spend 20 minutes listening to the Hall of Fame’s presentation.

“He spent three a half hours with us,” Baker said.

On the flight back to Canton, Baker, Lichter, Pat Lindesmith, a member of Baker’s management team at the Hall, and Marks knew the meeting with Johnson Controls wasn’t merely good.

“It was special. We just connected,” Baker said. “It wasn’t just the

Hall. It wasn’t just IRG. It was all three of us really connected in the process. I came back on that airplane thinking, ‘These are exactly the type of people we want to be in a world-class project with.’”

“To have partners of this quality at the table with us is incredibly important,” Lichter said.

Soon, Johnson Controls and Hall of Fame Village signed an exclusivity agreement. That meant the Hall would not negotiate naming rights with any other company through September.

“We weren’t sure we wanted to have that exclusivity because there were some others interested,” Baker said. “When we flew out there, I wasn’t sure if this was a three-year deal or 18 years. I didn’t know if this was naming a building or naming the Village. ... I went there thinking there was probably a sexier partner out there. When I came back, I looked to Stu and said, ‘These guys are the perfect partner for us. They believe the same things we believe.’”

“As I look at this agreement, I think it’s going to be very good for the greater community. They have an interest in tying in the rest of the city.”

**WORKING THROUGH DETAILS**

It took about 16 weeks to get the deal signed. It is a complicated 187-page contract.

Lindesmith, in charge of sponsorships and Gold Jacket relations for the Hall, landed the biggest contract of her career. George Veras, a 10-time Emmy Award winner, organized bringing sides together during Enshrinement Weekend. Dave Motts, a longtime vice president at the Hall who is retiring at the end of the year, made the initial contacts with the local Johnson Controls people.

The Hall did business with Johnson Controls when the museum was remodeled and the archival area was outfitted with temperature and humidity controls.

“I’ve been involved in enough of these big deals where, normally by the end of it, everyone is so beat up you don’t want anything to do with each other,” Baker said. “You almost need a break. In this case, everyone had so much respect for one another that (Thursday night) we had dinner in New York together at Cipriani (on Wall Street). It was their team, our team, Stu Lichter ... they’re so excited about the future.”

It doesn’t mean there weren’t hiccups.

Baker spoke very highly of Lindesmith and how far she has advanced since taking on new responsibilities.

“She’s managing attorneys for (Johnson Controls) and ours, and she was keeping this process on track and going forward,” Baker said. “I don’t think there was a weekend where there weren’t conference calls among the parties, groups and lawyers, and frequently they’d go until 1, 2, 3 in the morning. But everyone fit so well together.”

When Baker came to Canton, he had big ideas. His staff has grown around him.

“Listen, people should understand this: This wasn’t Dave Baker ‘wowing’ someone,” he said. “I’m blessed with a staff that has grown so much. I’ve worked in New York with some of the best sports people in the world. I’m here to tell you the people at 2121 George Halas Drive can match up with anyone.”



# HORIZON

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Center, Legend’s Landing player care center, and the Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Experience.

“We are creating the most inspiring place on earth,” said Pete Fierle, the Hall of Fame’s vice president of communications. “People will come here, and through the stories we tell, they will take the values of the game and pass it on.”

With final completion dates expected for all phases of the project by 2020, Hall officials are aiming to host the NFL draft in 2019 or 2020, as well as the league’s centennial celebration in 2020.

“We are working around the clock,” Fierle said. The opportunity in 2020 is once in a lifetime. The centennial celebration will be pretty extraordinary.”

The Hall of Fame Museum will remain the centerpiece of the village and the Hall of Fame experience, highlighted by the “A Game for Life” holographic theater, which opened in July 2016. The museum, which opened in 1963 with 19,000 square feet, has been expanded over the years to its present 118,000 square feet. Next year, the Hall will become the first sports museum to be an accredited museum through the American Alliance of Museums, according to Fierle.

“The museum is the center of our campus,” Fierle said. “In it, we are promoting the values learned from the game, and celebrating excellence everywhere... The accreditation recognizes our curatorial staff.”

According to Allyson Bussey, President of Visit Canton – formerly the convention and visitor’s bureau – the accreditation process

was lengthy and strenuous. “This is a very prestigious honor for the museum and speaks to the quality of the what they are doing with programming, archives and strategic vision,” she said.

Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium is in the midst of a major renovation, expected to be completed by summer 2018. Included in a September 2016 Forbes list of “13 Game-Changing NFL Stadiums,” it will seat approximately 23,000 fans and features a built-in stage at the 50-yard line of the north stands. Because the construction is being completed in three phases, high school and college football games will not be impacted. The stadium is home to the McKinley Bulldogs, Malone Pioneers and Walsh Cavaliers. Renovations include an NFL-caliber press box, hospitality experiences, several premium seating options including some with views overlooking the Hall of Fame Village, and a fan plaza to better connect the stadium to the Hall of Fame.

Renderings of the proposed Hilton Hall of Fame hotel and conference center show a stunning four-star facility that will feature more than 240 football-themed rooms and a 25,000-square-foot conference center. Hall officials plan a summer 2019 opening for the hotel, which is also expected to feature a farm-to-table American cuisine restaurant; lobby lounge and bar; coffee bar; Shula’s Steakhouse and additional retail spaces; indoor pool, spa and fitness center; technology and business centers; and an event space with a ballroom and theater. Hotel rooms will feature climate controls that can be monitored using Johnson Controls technology.



Photo courtesy of Pro Football Hall of Fame

## A rendering of Main Street Hall of Fame Village.

The National Football and Youth Sports Complex will include eight turf fields, lighted for evening and night games and equipped with video capability and other technology. The complex will include a concourse area and a championship field with seating for approximately 3,000. Five of the fields are expected to be open and ready for use by the end of May, and all eight are expected to be complete by spring 2018. The fields drew more than 30,000 athletes in 2016, and attendance is expected to top 180,000 when the complex is completed.

Main Street Hall of Fame Village is expected to open in early 2019. It will feature retail stores, restaurants, office space and more, including what is being dubbed the world’s greatest sports bar.

The Center for Excellence, also expected to open in early 2019, will be home to a Coach’s University, Institute for Integrity of Officiating, Academy of Corporate Excellence and a medical component in partnership with Aultman Hospital for health, wellness, rehabilitation and

research.

The Performance Center will house a full indoor football field with seating for 8,000, as well as a basketball arena with seating for 5,500. Expected to open in 2020, the center also will feature 80,000 square feet of convention space.

The Player Care Center will feature an array of health services including Legends Landing, a football-themed independent and assisted living facility for retired Hall of Famers and other members of the NFL community, including coaches, officials and administrators.

Hall officials and others call the Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Experience the “Disneyland of football.” It is expected to provide guests with an immersive, interactive virtual reality experience that puts them not only at the game, but in the game. A water park is also planned as part of the attraction.

“Disney was built in a swamp,” Fierle said. “We’ve been here. What we’re creating here – what we’re building will not only impact the area economically, but in hope.”

# PLAYERS

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Fame has a persona to match his size.

David Baker, named the Hall’s president in January 2014, came to Canton from Henderson, Nevada, after helping spur development on a massive health care complex. Baker was a partner in Union Village, the first integrated health care facility in the country.

“We didn’t come here for the weather,” Baker said, jokingly.

He has equally big plans for Canton. The former basketball captain and power forward at the University of California has had a variety of titles — including politician, attorney and commissioner of the Arena Football League. Baker is generally credited with increasing the value of AFL franchises. During his time as commissioner, the NFL and AFL had a working relationship, and NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue assigned a young lawyer at the NFL’s offices to meet with Baker once a month. That young attorney was Roger Goodell, now the NFL commissioner.

Baker is also the former mayor of Irvine, California.

In his most recent role, Baker has championed the city of Canton and Hall of Fame Village plans, which he has said could only succeed in “the birthplace of the game.”

## THE PROSPECTOR

Stuart Lichter has made a career of transforming forsaken properties into

flourishing real estate.

The founder of the California-based Industrial Realty Group set his sight on the Canton area as early as 2008 with the purchase of the former Hoover Co. building. It’s owned by Maple Street Commerce, of which he is lead developer. Lichter is president and chairman of the board at IRG.

On David Baker’s third day as Hall of Fame president, city leaders arranged for him to meet Lichter. Canton Mayor William J. Healy II asked Lichter what he would do to spur development, and Lichter suggested expanding the area around the Hall of Fame.

He then put money down on a feasibility study and began making plans for Hall of Fame Village. At a recent news conference to reveal an economic impact report, Lichter said he hoped people could soon find a new “jewel in Canton.”

## NFL BACKERS

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell has pledged support to the Hall of Fame Village, and New Orleans Saints owner Tom Benson gave \$11 million to make at least part of it happen.

When Hall president David Baker asked Benson to donate \$10 million to stadium renovations, Benson added another million for Legends Landing, a planned assisted living area for pro football greats. The Hall of Fame and Canton City School District, which owns the stadium, then chose to rename Fawcett

Stadium for Benson.

“While recognition for a gift like this is nice, it is not the point,” Benson previously told The Repository. “The point is understanding what is behind the plans for the Hall of Fame Village for me, and once I learned them, I wanted to play a role.”

Goodell also has been vocal in his support of the project and has said the league would like to continue its relationship with the Hall of Fame.

“If our owners are more actively involved in the entire planning process and focus, I think our support going forward is not just showing rah-rah support, which we will, but we’d also like to play a role in how this comes out, and do it in a way that will be good for the Hall of Fame, for Canton and for the NFL,” Goodell told The Repository.

The league, which celebrates its centennial in 2020, has indicated Canton could potentially host the 2019 NFL Draft, but Goodell has said the Hall of Fame Village would be an attraction for the long term.

## THE STRATEGIST

Dennis Saunier wants people in Canton for more than the Hall of Fame Village.

The president and CEO of the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce sees the tourist attraction as a driving force for other area development, such as Market Square, the vacant grassy area downtown.

“Because of Hall of Fame

Village, everyone else is dreaming bigger, too,” Saunier once told Baker.

The ideal plan involves closely linking the Village to the city, which would provide more attractions and encourage longer visits. Saunier has advocated for development at Market Square, a mere 2.5 miles from the Hall of Fame, to draw people downtown.

The Hall and other foundations have shown interest in turning the empty acre into an entertainment and dining hub, and Canton City Council in February informally agreed to explore options.

## THE PROMOTER

Canton Mayor William J. Healy II has been nothing but vocal in his support for Hall of Fame Village.

He has touted the project and its potential effect on the city as the equivalent of the Super Bowl or Olympics.

“Canton 2020 is something that could be incredibly grand for us,” he said, referencing the NFL’s centennial celebration. “This could be the catalyst that makes it our Olympic experience for a community our size.”

Healy, along with Deputy Mayor Fonda Williams, arranged the initial meeting between Hall of Fame President David Baker and IRG founder Stuart Lichter to discuss development opportunities.

The mayor also verbally committed \$5 million to help leverage local and state dollars more than a year before City Council formally

approved the city’s investment in late 2014, and he spoke in support of the project and subsequent stadium name change at a city school board meeting.

## THE FACILITATOR

Ideas for Hall of Fame Village started with renovations to Canton City Schools’ football stadium.

Superintendent Adrian Allison and the district’s school board worked with the Hall of Fame as NFL-supported plans evolved this past year. Beyond stadium improvements, the project now includes upgrades to the nearby school parking lot and new athletic fields by Don Scott Field.

“The investment of these organizations will benefit the city and the children of the Canton City School District, and for that we are extremely grateful,” Allison said in a statement posted to the district website. “We look forward to this continued partnership and eagerly await this exciting project.”

Canton City Schools agreed in late 2014 to rename Fawcett Stadium, which is between McKinley High School and the Hall of Fame, in recognition of an \$11 million gift from New Orleans Saints owner Tom Benson. Allison traveled with Hall of Fame President David Baker to make the announcement at a New Orleans game.

The district also allowed the Hall of Fame to sell beer at enshrinement events and donated a portion of the proceeds to the Hall of Fame Village feasibility study last year.





# Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium



At top is a rendering of Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium.

Above is a rendering of the enshrinement ceremony.

At left is a rendering of the stadium's Sky Level seating.

At right is a rendering of the interior of Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium.



At left is a rendering of Club Level seating at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium.





# Hall of Fame hotel and more



At top is a rendering of the four-star Hilton Hall of Fame hotel exterior.

Above is a rendering of the hotel interior.

At left is a rendering of the Legends Landing player care center.

At right is a rendering of Main Street Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame hotel is visible in the background.



At left is a rendering of the Pro Football Hall of Fame Village's Center for Excellence. Part of Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium is visible at the left.



# Pessimism persists in the area

By **DARRICK BOORD**  
*Kent State University*

Northeast Ohio is a tough area.

The people are tough, the weather is tough, and often, the only kind of luck here is tough. “Wait until next year” has been a common refrain for years in the region, especially in regard to the sports teams.

The Drive. The Fumble. The Shot. Art Modell. The Move (and the Return). Jose Mesa in ’97. So many other moments, so many memories, so many people and personalities, would-be heroes and always-will-be goats along the way.

One big event, and one big project, may have begun to change some of that tough-luck attitude, though.

The Cleveland Cavaliers capturing the 2016 NBA championship lifted the spirits of nearly everyone in the region, giving a sense of pride and accomplishment, along with the realization that sometimes, dreams do come true. The Cavs made the seemingly impossible feel possible.

“Hope is a key factor,” said Pete Fierle, vice president of communications at the Pro Football Hall of Fame. “With Ohio State winning, LeBron coming back, the Cavs winning, the Indians in the World Series... There’s great hope in the community.”

It is difficult to tell if Fierle is referring to a general sense of hope in the area, or a more specific accomplishment. Fierle is excited for the entire region, but what he’s most excited about is the Pro Football Hall of Fame Village, a stunning \$600 million work-in-progress that intends to transform the Hall of Fame from a prolific collection of football artifacts and history into a world-class sports and entertainment destination.

“At first, when we went out speaking about this, it was seen as a starry-eyed idea,” Fierle said. “Some people said it’s a great idea, but it can’t happen here. It’s happening.”

The pessimism may persist in some parts of the community, but as the project progresses and becomes more of a reality, more and more people are beginning to experience the hope.

“You see it just when people talk about the Browns and things like that. It’s in our fabric, right?” said Edmond Mack, Canton City Councilman. “And that’s the reality of it.”

Mack, however, says that efforts by the city of Canton and other cities in the region have helped to begin to change the attitude and perception of the area.

“I think really something that’s helped is some of our efforts in Canton to be more progressive. We’re one of the first cities in Ohio to legalize an open container outside. And I think one of the things that helped that, have been the measurable benefits that you see in downtown Cleveland. I think everybody knows now that that city, their downtown is really – it’s unrecognizable from where it was 15 years ago.

“There can be urban successes and these Rust Belt cities can re-identify themselves. You see it in ... smaller downtowns too. Downtown Wooster is a really cool place. So hopefully we can keep our efforts going forward and keep doing these different things that we’re doing. I love being a part of them.”

Allyson Bussey, president of Visit Canton – formerly the Canton-Stark County Convention and Visitors bureau – spends her time promoting all that the county has to offer in an attempt to convince outsiders to spend their time and tourism dollars here. Bussey said that as she visits some of the destinations throughout the area, she can also feel the pendulum swing in the attitude of residents – and part of that is tied to the progress being made with the Hall of Fame Village.

“For some reason we can be our own worst critics. It’s really a shame that some in our community have become so self-loathing,” Bussey said. “While you will never please all doubters, I think that as each element is completed – the stadium being almost finished, the hotel breaking ground recently – that the negativity seems to lessen and you see more people jumping on the bandwagon.”

Denny Saunier also works hard to keep his finger on the pulse of the community. Saunier is president of the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, where he oversees its mission to lead the region in business and community development through collaboration and innovation. The Chamber represents about 1,600 businesses and individuals, and Saunier is responsible for acting in the best interests of those members. He has also

experienced the pessimism of the region, and sees it as partly his responsibility to try to turn that attitude around.

“We have to do a better job of having people in Northeast Ohio realize what this means to them,” Saunier said. “It’s not just Canton. Akron and Cleveland will be a beneficiary of this as well. How we think and act, the products we put forth collectively will enable the Village to be the success we are all hoping it will be.

“A lot of people will sit back and say something will never happen. Sometimes that’s because little has happened. But when you drive up 77 and see a 1930s high school stadium becoming an important NFL stadium, when you see the groundbreaking for the hotel, people start to believe. The best thing you can do is do what you’re doing as best as you can. Without visionaries, without risk-takers reaching for the stars, nothing happens.”

Saunier knows that perception is tied to the region, not just the city or county. Attitudes, perceptions, feelings and situations tend to rise and fall together.

“Northeast Ohio is a region, but it’s also made up of four fairly large communities – Cleveland, Akron, Canton and Youngstown – so there’s a sense of each community wanting to have its own independence,” Saunier said. “With the Republican National Convention, LeBron coming back, Cleveland winning the NBA championship – there’s been no mileage change, but our perception of us being part of Cleveland certainly did. Winners attract winners. The Browns are the Browns, but someday that will change too – hopefully sooner rather than later.

“The fans here are not fair-weather fans. I think the Hall of Fame Village will bring them closer to Canton. But the region will be the beneficiary.”

While excitement over the Village slowly begins to erode some of the area’s pessimism, officials know their work is far from over. Attitude changes take time, and its takes more than one project – no matter its size and scope – to lift up a city, county, region and state.

“That’s why I’m on city council,” Mack said. “The moment that we’ve run out of things to do, I’m going to stop. I’m not going to do it anymore.”

# Impact of HOF project trickles to many roles

By **DARRICK BOORD**  
*Kent State University*

While the Pro Football Hall of Fame Village is expected to have an incredible impact throughout the community, county and region, what is often overlooked is the effect that such a project has on some of the individuals involved.

Several people throughout the community have seen their roles change due to the Hall of Fame Village project. From Hall officials to tourism industry employees and even to local reporters, these people have experienced a shift in workplace responsibilities as a result of the \$600 million undertaking.

“It’s kind of neat. I’ve never been in development,” said Pete Fierle, the Hall of Fame’s vice president of communications. “I’ve been in hundreds of meetings, heard hundreds of ideas. The goal is to change people’s lives. There’s a great momentum. It’s neat, a rare opportunity to be involved in something that can be so monumental.

“I spent a good part of my career in the archives. It’s interesting, I don’t deal much with football now – I’m more project-oriented. Our mission is bigger than football. It’s more about what football represents.”

Many new jobs already have been created for the Hall of Fame Village, including hundreds of construction jobs moving the project forward. In addition to the drastic shift for Fierle, Canton Repository reporter Alison Matas has seen her job shift from a government reporter to, essentially, a Hall of Fame reporter. Tourism and business professionals also have seen their roles change.

“It has presented a call to action, a call to vision – how can our organization, that represents 2,000 businesses in the county, be of support?” said Denny Saunier, president of the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce. “It’s one thing to be in favor of something, it’s another to be a meaningful contributor. My role is to take our mission and determine, what does that mean in relationship to the project?

Allyson Bussey is the president of Visit Canton, formerly the Convention and Visitor’s Bureau. Her role, and her personality, essentially make her the city’s – and county’s – biggest cheerleader.

“From a visitor/meeting planner/events rights holder perspective, we can’t build this Village fast enough,” Bussey said. “When we attend trade shows, go on sales missions, and speak to anyone outside the area, people are excited to come to the region. They have heard about the project and are ready to make the trip. It is a complete game-changer for us.

“The excitement in the marketplace is growing exponentially and is the reason that we are now able to get the attention of major events. We just recently secured the NCAA Division III championships.”

As construction work continues on the various phases of the Hall of Fame Village, work continues behind the scenes, throughout the community, as well.

“Every day counts,” Fierle said. “There’s no rest for the weary.”

## IMPACT

*Continued from Page 1*

here – it’s new money, the best way to make an impact.

According to an economic impact study completed in May 2015 by Conventions, Sports and Leisure, the village is expected to have a \$15.3 billion impact on Stark County over 25 years. The study, based on attendance projections provided by the Hall of Fame, is also expected to create more than 2,700 construction jobs, as well as 13,375 jobs related to the Village at its peak.

“There’s the tourism aspect, but it’s so much more than that in a development of that magnitude,” said Dennis Saunier, president of the Canton Regional

Chamber of Commerce. “When you throw a pebble into a lake, you get many layers of waves from that. I use that as an example for the economic impact, the jobs not just in Canton, but in northeast Ohio, and all of Ohio.”

To have that kind of impact, Saunier said it is important that other businesses get on board.

“The Hall of Fame’s mission, they market themselves as the most inspiring place on earth. The country has to be inspiring as well,” Saunier said. “Nationally, Canton is synonymous with the Hall of Fame. The city better carry the same image, or else it doesn’t work.

“People don’t typically think of what happens when people go back to wherever they came from.

They get an image of the community. It can be positive, neutral or negative. When you go to Disneyland, the entire experience impacts you, from the car rental, to the hotel, to the restaurants. The Hall of Fame is the center of interest here, but the community has to step up. It’s been the Chamber’s effort to see that the city lives up to expectations.”

Saunier also said that he is excited to think of what else may come to the community once the Village is finished.

“We’re talking about a potential five to seven million visitors a year,” he said. “That’s like a boulder in the lake; it’s no longer a pebble. There are going to be a lot of opportunities to locate businesses close to

that, brands and companies that wouldn’t otherwise. We need to put together strong plans to capitalize on what started 50-plus years ago at the Hall of Fame.

“The message for us locally, is we need to step up to the type of mission, the quality we are promoting. We need to be more friendly, more inviting, more innovating, more inclusive in our daily lives and in business.”

Saunier also talked about his meetings with David Baker, president of the Hall of Fame. Saunier said he met Baker on his first day, in January 2014, and they discussed some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Hall at the time. They also discussed how to improve those weaknesses and build on the strengths.

“My feelings were that the Hall of Fame is a great brand, and good for the county, but it was a simple museum with not a lot of interaction,” Saunier said. “You spend two hours or so, then go back home. What this (Village) represents is not two hours, but several days in the area.

“The vision is much more than football – it’s the use of football as a metaphor, teamwork as a metaphor for success in life. That message is for everyone. To understand what it takes, what teamwork means. For everyone to celebrate excellence. One of the greatest impacts the Hall of Fame has had on the community is it has given us an identity, someplace that has put Canton on the map in a positive manner.”

# HOF volunteer donates house money back to Hall

## Floyd Breit sold his home to the Hall, then decided to give a portion of the sale back

By **TODD PORTER**  
*Reprinted with permission from The Repository, Nov. 15, 2015*

David Baker’s office literally sits in the shadows of Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium. At least it used to when the stadium cast one. Baker has a bird’s eye view of construction that is underway on the stadium.

As the Pro Football Hall of Fame’s president and executive director, it is a constant reminder of the Herculean task before him. So you can excuse him if, from time to time, he seems preoccupied.

It’s usually then that something happens to refocus Baker on what is really important. One such thing happened recently.

Baker was making his way from one meeting to the next at the Hall when 88-year-old Floyd Breit, a volunteer, asked Baker if he had a few minutes to chat.

The impromptu meeting took place near a donor board inside the Hall. It is a board that honors everyone who has given at least a \$10,000 donation to the football museum.

“Mr. Baker,” Breit started to say, “the Hall of Fame recently bought my house.”

That sentence alone stopped Baker in his tracks. He had no idea what was about to come out of Breit’s mouth.

“I’m thinking, what else is about to come here?” Baker said.

It was something that brought tears to Baker’s eyes.

Breit told Baker he stands in

front of that donor board everyday and “I’m thinking it sure would be nice to have my name up there.”

Breit knew it would take a donation of \$10,000 or more to do so. He just so happened to have it because he sold his home on Blake Avenue NW to the Hall.

But Breit’s story is much deeper than a donation. When he was growing up in Stark County, he was raised by a single mother, during a time when, as he said, “it wasn’t real popular.” Rose Breit would be so proud of her son all these years later.

“I had a lot of guidance from her,” Breit said. “Before I went into the Navy at 17, I got my Eagle Scout at 15. I told her any achievement I had was dedicated to her because I wanted to show people a single mother could do it.

“I told her one day our name would be in lights and it would be a name to be proud of. I think if she walked past that board and saw the name, she would be proud.”

Last week, Breit presented a check to Baker for \$11,111.11. He made his donation on Veterans’ Day. The donor card on the board reads Floyd and Nancy Breit.

Floyd wanted to remember his late wife. She died in 2012. They were married for 63 years.

“We got a fair price for our home and I was going to make a donation with those proceeds,” Breit said. “It was only fair to take and give back. David Baker’s vision for the Hall of Fame is to grow it bigger than it is.

“I am an ordinary man. There’s no way I could be on the board, otherwise. I had a travel agency that I sold to Palmer Travel in 1980. I worked for Eastern Airlines. I’m a simple man.”

Simple men are the ones who make the most extraordinary examples.

**EMBRACING THE VILLAGE**

Baker tells Breit’s story with a tear in his eye. Before the presentation was made, the Hall of Fame called Breit’s children to make sure they were fine with the donation.

“Look, it is probably some of their inheritance,” Baker said. “They were fine with it. And the best thing about this is Mr. Breit was just so happy and giddy the entire time.

“After the ceremony, he looked at me and said, ‘Thank you very much. This is the best day of my life.’ And he’s the one giving us money. It shows you what the gift of giving is truly about.”

So Floyd Breit, who served at the end of World War II on the destroyer USS Joseph Kennedy, has his name in lights on a donor board at the Hall of Fame that will never come down.

“People should embrace this Hall of Fame Village idea,” Breit said. “This summer, I was in Cooperstown, New York. The environment to baseball in that city ... that could be football here. We’re heading that way with David Baker.”

This story, while it makes Baker swell with pride to tell, also brings him back to reality. There are a lot of people who have donated a lot of money to the Hall of Fame Village project. Tom Benson gave \$11

million. Floyd Breit gave just over \$11,000.

“He told me he was giving this to me because we are making a difference here,” Baker said. “Here’s a guy through his own generosity challenging me.”

**HE’S A TRAVELING MAN**

Breit spent his younger years, as mentioned, in the Navy. He made his living as a travel agent before selling his agency to Palmer Travel.

His experience as a travel agent helped him accomplish a rare traveling feat. He has flown around the world twice, once longitudinally over the two poles and once laterally around the equator.

**VILLAGE MAKING PROGRESS**

It seems Baker is mentioning plans to have the proposed hotel and center for excellence under construction more and more.

For the second time in a month, Baker mentioned publicly ground would be broken on both projects next year.

Work is progressing at Tom Benson Stadium now. Baker can look out his office window and see six steam shovels going to work lowering the field and building the plaza that will connect the stadium and Hall of Fame for the first time.

“When you’re in my position, sometimes your priorities focus on the problems,” Baker said.

“Almost every time that happens, God has a way of bringing me back to earth with some inspiration that has me saying, ‘Man, aren’t I lucky to be doing this?’ That’s what has happened with these volunteer stories.”

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## NEIGHBORS

*Continued from Page 1*

here we are, we think they’re going to buy our house, ... we don’t want to do any improvements to our home if we have to move. And you don’t get any answers. They’re not up front with you.”

Strohmeyer has lived with her husband in their home for nearly six decades.

“It’s our only home,” she said. “My husband is a ham radio operator. He has a 60- to 80-foot antenna connected to the house. Nowhere where we go will they allow him to have an antenna. So, he’s 82 years old, that’s going to be a big trauma for him. And, you know, at our age, where do you go? Where do you relocate to?

“My concern is, yes, they are giving what I understand, 30 percent over the value of your house. But what about the relocation costs? You know, that is a big problem. Relocation. We’ve been in our house for 59 years.”

Strohmeyer and her neighbor, Tracey Rohr, said they are not opposed to selling.

“Oh, we’re going to sell,” Strohmeyer said. “I mean, if they come and ask for our house, I’m selling because of the fact that I don’t want to be in this. I don’t want to sell, I mean, but I’m not going to be the only one in this area.”

However, the neighbors feel that, being at the edge of the properties that the Hall of Fame Village is con-

sidering purchasing, they are in a state of limbo.

“Me and Ro (Strohmeyer) went to one of the Canton meetings that they had down at the ballroom, trying to get some answers,” Rohr said. “You know, are they going to buy my house – now, later – because we’re sitting here, ok, do I sell now before this monstrosity goes in behind us, and just get maybe what we could out of our house? Or is it beneficial to wait and see if they make an offer? We’re told different things. So we’ve never gotten a straight answer. And at the meeting we went to for Canton, the guy said, ‘We bought all the houses we’re buying.’ But I’ve been told we’re Phase Two, that there’s different phases of development and, if not, maybe a developer will want us, if the Hall of Fame doesn’t buy us.

“I would love to paint, but, even doing anything outside ... you’re spending all this money, you know? Do you do anything? Do you sell now? Do you do any improvements? I’m going to need a hot water tank here shortly, do I want to put that in if they’re going to buy it? We’re kind of stuck.”

Officials at the Hall of Fame feel that they have been open with the public. Some of the uncertainty may stem from hearing different messages from different angles.

“Overall, this has been an incredibly public project,” said Pete Fierle, vice president of communications at the Hall of Fame.

“Early on, there were fears of eminent domain. But this is actually a private project. The worst fears were that we would take their house. But that can’t happen.

“After we communicated that, the neighborhood has been very receptive. We’ve held a couple meetings, been very open about it. We accept calls and e-mails. Anybody who has had an issue is not ignored, they’re being addressed. Overall, it’s been very positive.”

Strohmeyer and Rohr indicated they had not contacted the Hall directly, but instead were relying mainly on local government officials for their information.

“When I went to the township, not being mean, but I told them surely you guys, you’ve got to be in talks with them, because they’re taking the property from Plain Township,” Rohr said. “They know more than they’re saying.”

Plain Township trustee Scott Haws said the board has been working to do what is best for township residents.

“The hardest part in all of this is helping the homeowners that have been impacted,” Haws said. “Looking at homeowners and going, yeah, ultimately your property’s probably going to be purchased at some point in time. Helping them understand what their rights and their options are. I told all of them based upon some of the homes that had already been bought, they were coming in at very good premiums,

not only to what the county auditor had them at, but as well as what the market was offering.

“There’s definitely a segment where a lot of folks have been born and raised there, they’ve taken over homes from their parents and so forth, so they’re very embedded, so there’s a very strong emotional attachment there, so that’s difficult to overcome.”

Rohr and Strohmeyer said they and other neighbors have other concerns about the project as well. Construction traffic, annexation, noise, and the expected increase in traffic once the project is completed all worry the neighbors.

“They’ve been putting in new water lines, I can tell you two, three days in a two-week period I woke up with no water,” Rohr said. “No notification, I just go to turn my water on ... they’re putting in new water lines for all of this, they’ve put in new electrical lines, they’re going on people’s properties. And if there’s an abatement, at the one meeting, they said they’re just coming home to utility poles up on their property. So, there’s all kinds of things like that, that we have no control over and we don’t know.”

Strohmeyer said that she and her husband experienced a problem they’ve never dealt with before, that she attributes to the construction.

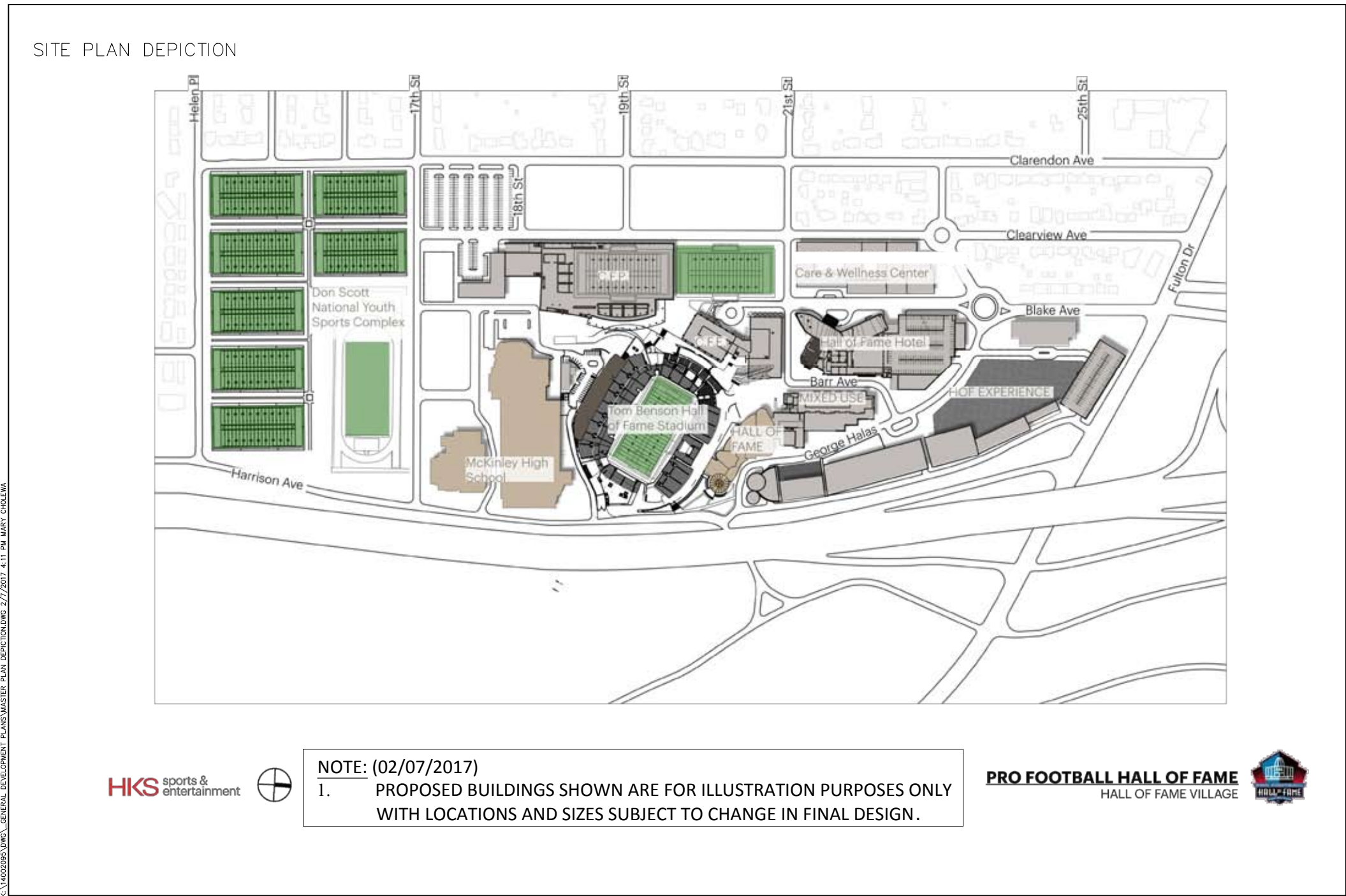
“Like I said, we’ve been in that house for 59 years, never had an electrical problem,” she said. “And my husband’s an electri-

cian, so he kind of was on top of everything. All of the sudden one day our electric buzzed and then went out. And I called the electrician and they came, they said “well, you have too much electricity coming into your home.” And that was because they upgraded. And see, I can’t prove it, but why all of the sudden my electric goes out? So I had to get a new box. It cost us over \$3,000. My husband, he would’ve done it, but we had to get all this work done because he’s not able. He’s 82 years old, has had a heart attack, had open heart surgery, had stents and he had a stroke. So what do we do at our age?”

With such a large project, with so many facets, individuals and organizations involved – from the Hall, to contractors, city and township officials, residents and more – communication sometimes can be a struggle.

“At the end of the day, this project’s definitely exciting,” Haws said. “It’s just a matter of making sure everything’s done with a sense of urgency, but it’s also done in a thorough state so as to not look back and have private enterprise going, ‘how did we miss this?’ Or we got folks asking their government officials ‘how in the heck did you guys miss this?’ The fact is there’s a lot of eyes looking at it, thinking about it, asking questions, so it’s very fluid, forward-moving situation to which we’re all keeping attuned with. I think everybody’s responded well to this point.”





Courtesy of the Pro Football Hall of Fame

Shown are the site plans for Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Village, which were filed with the city Canton. Any significant changes must be approved by the city.

# Officials confident Hall’s history won’t be harmed

By DARRICK BOORD  
Kent State University

With so much focus of the Hall of Fame Village being on the numbers – the cost, the jobs, the economic impact – it is understandable if some people lose focus of the Hall’s primary purpose. The Pro Football Hall of Fame states its mission is to honor the heroes of the game, preserve its history, promote its values and celebrate excellence everywhere.

The enticement of a big-money project bringing attention, jobs, tourists and more to the area – even just the prospect of new buildings and attractions – makes it easy for some to overlook that mission statement and think instead about what the future holds. While that future certainly looks exciting, it’s the history that has made the project possible.

“Everything is grounded in our mission, said Pete Fierle, the Hall of Fame’s vice president of communications. “There are 310 players in the Hall of Fame out of about 27,000 professional football players. Our focus is on what made those 310 extraordinary. On preserving that history.”

That focus is evident to most everyone who works with the team at the Hall of Fame. There seems to be little worry that the Hall’s mission or focus will be altered by the Village project.

“I am completely confident that the historic integrity of what the Hall represents in not only going to be preserved but will be enhanced,” said Allyson Bussey, president of Visit Canton. Bussey said she has sat in on “hundreds” of meetings with Hall of Fame president David Baker and his team. “They open every single meeting with their

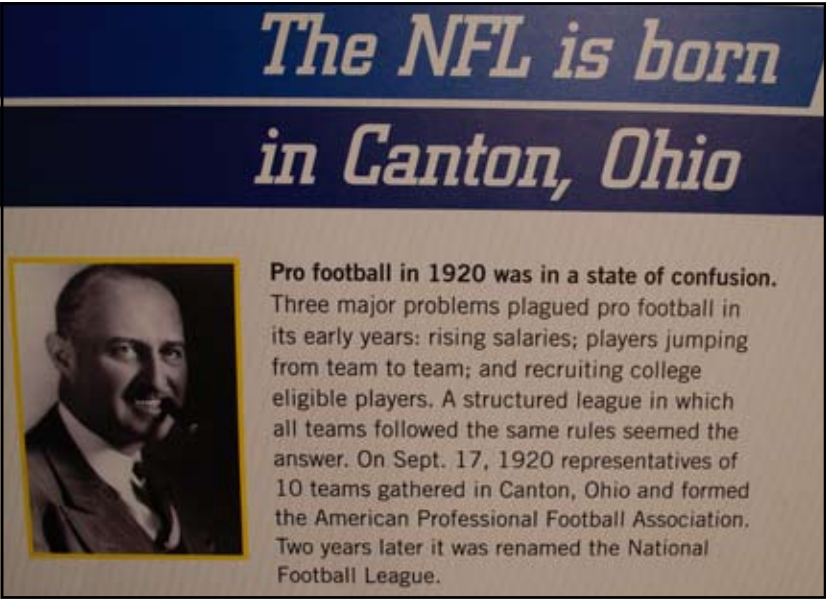


Photo by Darrick Boord

A display from the Pro Football Hall of Fame discusses football’s origins in Canton.

mission statement, and follow that by saying that if any part of the project doesn’t coincide with the mission, it’s not going to be included. They live by the mission of the Hall and are even creating programming that will train all third-party staff, corporate professionals and even volunteers to uphold an espouse the mission of the Hall throughout the Village.

“Think Disney, but with the values of the Hall.”

Fierle also said that the programming will be a big part of what’s in store with the Village.

“So much focus is on the buildings, but we’re spending more time on what’s going on inside the buildings,” Fierle said. “It’s about what football can teach us for life, and giving Hall of Famers a platform for life. It’s about our five core values.” Those values, Fierle said, are commitment, integrity, courage, respect and excellence.

Canton councilman Edmond Mack sees the Village as part of a larger effort to restore the city to a place that attracts visitors from near and far – and not just to the Hall.

“For decades, the Pro

Football Hall of Fame has been a part of not just the city’s history, but I think the county’s history as a whole,” said Mack, who in addition to his spot on council, has practiced law in the city for 10 years. “You see that when you go under 77 there on Dressler, you see it says, ‘Stark County, home of the pro football Hall of Fame,’ and I think that’s important. To increase that legacy, to try to build something that’s more of an experience ... something that really kind of enhances it and brings more people to the area and does more to celebrate the contribution of the Pro Football Hall of Fame ... I think it raises the community as a whole.

“When you watch the Pro Football Hall of Fame game on television or when people are talking about excellent football players, they say they are going to be in Canton someday. So I think that increasing the visibility of the Hall of Fame, the commercial success of the Hall of Fame, I think that it has a real potential to have a really positive impact on our community’s historical fabric.”

Canton Regional Cham-

ber of Commerce CEO Denny Saunier feels that the Hall is something the community is proud of, and the new Village will only serve to enhance that.

“I think there’s a sense of pride when people speak of living in this area, having the Hall here,” Saunier said. He boasted that among the people he works with from other cities and areas, Canton is very envied. “Especially among communities of this size, to have a worldwide brand here is great. I think it brings unity in some areas. Certainly with the induction. It has given the community entertainment and recreation over the years with the festival events.”

Saunier also emphasized the need to tie the events and attractions of the Hall into the community at large, and more specifically, into the city.

“We need to emphasize the opportunities that attention brings. We’re trying to get people from the Hall of Fame to Canton. What’s the mechanism? We’re working on transportation

corridors, a Market Square project with an iconic image that ties in to the Hall, all to complement what’s happening at the Village. We also need to have activities planned year-round to spur economic growth.

“We have to do a better job of having people in northeast Ohio realize what this means to them. Akron and Cleveland also will be beneficiaries of this.”

Officials all seem to agree that the Hall of Fame Village will be extremely beneficial to the community, while maintaining a focus on what makes the Hall – and the game of football – so important to so many people.

“We never lose sight of the mission,” Fierle said. “It’s been encouraging to see, seeing the community do it, as well – using football to talk about what else we have to offer. People come here because of the values and what it represents.

“This is not going to be just good or great, but truly excellent, world-class. It can’t be just very good.”

## Thank you

A project of this size and scope requires so much more than the efforts of one person. First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Leslie Heaphy for her enthusiasm, guidance, patience and understanding. I would also like to thank everyone who took their time to allow me to interview them, including Pete Fierle, Edmond Mack, Scott Haws, Denny Saunier, Allyson Bussey, Todd Porter and Alison Matas, Rocio Strohmeier and Tracey Rohr, as well as Savannah Courtenay – who helped transcribe some of those interviews. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my fiancée, Amber Ashley, for her constant encouragement and patience with the hours upon hours that this project has usurped, as well as my son, Phillip, who also often had to deal with my mental absence while I was focused on this effort. While I think that covers everyone, I extend sincere apologies to anyone I may have omitted.

-Darrick Boord