



Brownfields Metamorphosis—From Abandoned Properties to Cultural Celebrations

CULTURAL REUSES

One of the objectives of the Brownfields Pilot Program is to enable a community to "take back the land" and make it not only useful and productive, but something to call their own—a space or structure that is unique to their community. Though economic revitalization is the cornerstone of the Brownfields Program, more and more communities are looking to redevelop brownfields properties to represent and preserve their history and culture. Several brownfields communities are in the process of constructing new buildings or renovating old buildings as museums and cultural and educational community centers. Many communities also have efforts underway to restore and preserve historic districts. All of the Brownfields Pilots participating in culture-oriented redevelopment target economically distressed communities where former industrial sites have been passed over for redevelopment because of the stigma of environmental contamination.

In the City of Tacoma, Washington, a 1.6-acre brownfield site is being transformed into the Museum of Glass. The museum will spotlight an internationally acclaimed local glass artist, Dale Chihuly, as well as glass artists from around the world. In 1996, the City of Tacoma was awarded a \$200,000 Brownfields Assessment Pilot grant to help encourage economic growth and redevelopment of the downtown area, focusing its efforts on the western side of the Thea Foss Waterway. This area includes a 1.5-mile inlet of the Commencement Bay that was originally developed as an industrial zone, housing numerous mill and maritime activities and serving as a terminal for Northern Pacific Railroad. During the last few decades, this area lost most of its industry, leaving abandoned buildings, contaminated properties, and high unemployment. Almost half of the area residents live below the poverty line.

The Pilot conducted assessments at the site and facilitated the purchase of the property with a provision that the new

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JUST THE FACTS:

- In Tacoma, Washington, Brownfields Pilot assessments of a 1.6-acre brownfield led to a \$1.3 million dollar cleanup and construction of a \$58 million, privately-funded museum.
- A former brownfield is also home to a new museum in Fayetteville, North Carolina—the \$22.5 million, Airborne and Special Operations Museum (ASOM).
- In Louisville, Kentucky, a former historic street rail car complex is being transformed into a \$20 million African-American Heritage center and museum.

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owners conduct cleanup using city funds. In 1996, the City of Tacoma completed the \$1.3 million cleanup. Ground was broken in September 2000, and the museum is planning a July 2002 opening. The \$58 million museum is being constructed with all private funding. In addition, the City of Tacoma is providing \$8 million for construction of a parking garage, a rooftop public plaza, and esplanade. The city, state, and Federal Highway Administration will provide \$4.8 million for a pedestrian walkway—the planned "Chihuly Bridge of Glass"—to link the area to downtown Tacoma. The walkway will complement the Museum of Glass with large exhibits and displays of unique glass artwork donated by Dale Chihuly and the Glass Museum, valued at nearly \$10 million. The Museum of Glass will be the cornerstone for future waterway projects in downtown Tacoma.

A new museum recently opened in the City of Fayetteville, North Carolina—the \$22.5 million Airborne and Special Operations Museum (ASOM). Part of the U.S. Army Museum system, the new 59,000-square-foot museum is located on a 6.6-acre former brownfield that has been home to gas stations, car lots, and a building used by a local publishing company. The site's downtown location had been in decline since the 1970s, when businesses, manufacturers, and other facilities closed or relocated to outlying areas. This migration created several brownfields and led to Cumberland County's federal designation as an Urban Distressed Community. The Fayetteville Brownfields Pilot coordinated the assessment and cleanup activities at the ASOM site. Environmental site assessments revealed contamination from asbestos and petroleum, and the city and the museum shared the cost of cleanup, which included removal of underground storage tanks. Funding for the museum came from a variety of sources, including federal, state, and county grants, private donations, and contributions from military associations.

The museum houses displays of the history, technology, weaponry, and equipment of the U.S. airborne and special operations from the first Parachute Test Platoon of the 1940s to modern-day units. The museum is currently attracting 20,000 visitors each month, and that number is expected to increase as the state expands its promotional campaign, including featuring the museum on the cover of the 2001 state map. The ASOM is playing a significant part in the economic revitalization of downtown Fayetteville. The Pilot reports that not far from the museum site, a new, \$30 million performing arts center will anchor redevelopment of the Manufactured Gas Plant site, a 40-acre brownfield that will also be reused for an amphitheater and greenspace development. Cleanup at this site is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2002. The performing arts center is being realized through a partnership between the city and Fayetteville State University, a historically black institution. This project, along with

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the ASOM, represents the city's commitment to cultural development, the environment, and improving the overall quality of life of the citizens of Fayetteville.

There are a number of other cities that have culturally themed redevelopment plans underway. In the City of Louisville, Kentucky, the Brownfields Assessment Pilot completed site assessment work to facilitate redevelopment of a former historic street rail car complex, commonly referred to as the "Trolley Barn," into a \$20 million Kentucky Center for African-American Heritage and museum. This redevelopment project, which is set to be completed mid-2003, will focus on the historical and cultural contributions of African-Americans to the entire region and celebrate African-American art.

Bethlehem Steel's former plant in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, will soon be home to the National Museum of Industrial History, the first museum in the Smithsonian Institution's Affiliation Program. Nearly 100 of the Smithsonian's industrial artifacts from the mid-nineteenth century have been loaned to the museum. They will be displayed at a Preview Center (opening in spring 2002) until the museum is completed in 2004 or 2005. The Bethlehem site is a unique twist on the brownfields redevelopment project in that the plant was able to prevent the site from actually becoming a brownfield by abiding by guidelines set by the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) during the plant's operation.



In Prichard, Alabama, a nineteenth century railroad maintenance building that sits on a brownfield site will soon be home to the Casey Jones Museum and Park. John Luther "Casey" Jones worked the M&O line between Mobile, Alabama, and Jackson, Tennessee. The historical preservation museum will present the story of the legendary folk hero and will feature artifacts representing the history of the railroad.

Several other cities with different types of Brownfields Pilots are redeveloping brownfields into cultural, educational, and community centers. In Las Vegas, Nevada, a former National Guard Armory site, which was the first brownfield cleaned up under EPA's Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund, will soon be home to the East Las Vegas Cultural Center. The Center will be built in a Spanish architecture style and will contain a senior center as well as a small business incubator. As part of a Targeted Brownfields Assessment in Honolulu, Hawaii, a waterfront brownfield is home to the Hawaii Children's Discovery Center. The Center, with three floors of hands-on exhibits, was the first redevelopment project to be completed on the site, and there are plans for an aquarium and a youth theater as well as a school, housing, and parks. The City of Santa Fe, New Mexico, is redeveloping a former 50-acre rail yard into a cultural center, recreational park and plaza, and industrial park. In Worcester, Massachusetts, the Central Massachusetts Economic Development Authority (CMEDA) is transforming part of an abandoned mill property into a visitors' center and museum with a history of the Industrial Revolution theme to celebrate the city's 200-year industrial and manufacturing history.

All types of EPA's Brownfields Pilots in cities across the country are helping to restore brownfields and the neighborhoods that surround them into viable communities. These culturally themed brownfields redevelopment projects not only promise economic benefits, they also bolster community pride as they celebrate the unique cultures and histories of their communities.