



## **Project: Restoration of the Historic Centralia Railroad Depot**

***Name: David R. Eatwell***

***City of Centralia Community Development***

***P.O. Box 609***

***Centralia, WA 98531***

***(360) 330-7566 FAX (360) 330-7673***

### **Project Summary:**

The restoration of the Centralia Depot into a multi-modal transportation node is the culmination of more than 20 years work led by the City of Centralia, but involving all levels of government. In that time, going through two different phases of construction, this building has been returned to its original form, in all its elegance, using original materials.

### **Project Background:**

The Centralia Union Depot for decades had been the heart of the downtown's commerce, the entry point to the city when rail ruled. Forty-four passenger trains daily traded travelers with fourteen hotels along Tower Avenue. In that flow of people and cash, five theaters and eight banks flourished downtown. But when the automobile and I-5 supplanted rail as the primary mode of transportation, downtown Centralia faded. Over the years, the original depot building had undergone the worst that remodeling could do to an historic building. The dormers had been removed to allow an asphalt shingle roof to replace the original tile. Much of the ornate plaster work in the lobby's rotunda had been cut up to allow a suspended ceiling to be installed, covering much of the oak plank millwork.

In the mid-1980's Centralia's leaders recognized the need to focus attention on the deteriorating downtown core. The Downtown Economic Redevelopment Plan identified acquisition and restoration of the Union Depot as a key element of downtown revitalization.

### **Project Description:**

Recognizing Centralia's Union Depot as an important link in the high-speed rail corridor, the Washington State Department of Transportation Rail Branch invited Centralia to enter negotiations to acquire the depot from Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad. Centralia exercised an option to take ownership and the design process began. The next step was to hire an architectural firm experienced in historic restoration, Easters and Kittle out of Issaquah, WA.

Aside from the deteriorated building, a new passenger platform and parking lot were needed. Seismic retrofit, HVAC upgrades, fire suppression, enhanced utilities, and better lighting were included. The first phase of work, which started in 1996, was intended to stop further deterioration of the building. Four tons of pigeon residue was removed from the attic. The dormers were replaced, a new tile roof installed, the brick was tuck pointed, and new utilities were stubbed into the building. Phase 1 also included a new parking lot at each end of the block-long building.

Phase 2 addressed restoration of the interior. A new terrazzo floor, stripped and varnished mill work, polished brass and tile spread throughout the lobby, AMTRAK ticket office, baggage room, freight room and the Express building. New HVAC and an elevator added nearly 3,000 Sq.Ft. of rentable commercial space on the second floor. The restoration was completed in April 2002 and celebrated in Centralia's 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Railroad Days, a festival that continues with this year's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual event.



**AFTER: New terrazzo, refinished benches and cleaned tile work now reflect light into the rotunda dome.**

Total cost was \$4.4 million. Project funding came from the City of Centralia, the Washington State Department of Transportation (Rail Branch Division), the Washington State Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, the Washington State Transportation Improvement Board, the Federal Highway Administration, and AMTRAK.

### **Effectiveness:**

What was once a dark hulk is now the focal point of a revitalized downtown Centralia. In today's world, it is not possible to erect a building of this quality for any price. Time will show that this was \$4.4 million very well spent. The restored Depot is a transportation hub serving eight passenger trains and four bus transit companies daily. WADOT plans 26 passenger trains daily eventually. This magnificent facility will serve the transportation needs of downtown Centralia and the region for another 100 years.

The second floor of the depot building is home to Strategic Ancillaries, Inc., a consulting firm with a national clientele. The revenue from that lease will provide funds to maintain the depot. Two commercial spaces on the street level that total another 3,000 Sq.Ft. host meetings of business groups, service organizations and family gatherings as they await commercial tenants.

As our high-speed Talgo trains approach their full potential, more high-tech companies see Centralia as the best location from which to serve clients in Portland and Seattle. AMTRAK and local hotels now feature special excursion packages that bring more and more visitors to Centralia every week. *AAA Journey Magazine* has chosen to feature Centralia in its annual subscriber sweepstakes, which includes an all-expenses trip to Centralia by rail, over-night accommodations at the McMenamins Railroad Hotel and Theater.

### **Conclusions:**

The restoration of the Centralia Union Depot very easily could have never been undertaken in an area with such a distressed economy. But the vision, the energy and determination were found to do it. The fundamental belief that Centralia's history and architecture are our most valuable commodities drove City leadership to take on this monumental task, even though many of them knew that they might no longer be in office when the project was completed. Restoration of the Centralia Union Depot was an act of singular vision and commitment, deserving of special recognition as a key element of the revitalization of Downtown Centralia.



**BEFORE: Lowered ceiling and coats of paint hid magnificent design features and woodwork for decades.**



***BEFORE: A deteriorated roof, broken windows and tons of pigeon residue had to be removed.***

**Recognition information:**

Mayor Tim Browning

Council Carol Lee Nealy

Ted Shannon

Dan Keahey

Bill Moeller

Bonnie Canaday

City Manager: J.D. Fouts

All can be reached at: City of Centralia

P.O. Box 609

Centralia, WA 98531

(360) 330-7674 FAX (360) 330-7673

Easters and Kittle Architects, PS

Carl Easters

Kurt Kittle

Easters & Kittle, PS

195 Front Street N.

Issaquah, WA 98027

(425) 392-7339

FAX (425) 392-7409