

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**RE: UPPER UNION STREET IN TOUCH WITH ITS HISTORY FOR BICENTENNIAL HISTORY & HERITAGE EVENT**

**SCHENECTADY, NY -6-4-2009---** Schenectady County's Bicentennial Committee's "History & Heritage Day" on Saturday, June 6 and the BID's participation in the **Explore NY 400** initiative in celebration of Dutch discovery and exploration 400 years ago, have prompted members of the Union Street BID (Business Improvement District) to search their roots and uncover forgotten tidbits about the district's past.

Participants in the County's Passport to History promotion may have their Passports stamped at **Sow's Ear Studio**, 1597 Upper Union Street, Schenectady among other sites throughout the county. The promotion runs for the entire month of June. Kids under 16 can get passports stamped and enter to win cool prizes. The Passports are available at [www.Schenectadycounty2009.com](http://www.Schenectadycounty2009.com) and at all Schenectady County Public Library branches.

An exhibit of historic photos, work sheets for a "The Way We Were Game" and an opportunity to enter a free raffle of a basket of gift certificates from **Upper Union Street Businesses** will also be available at the Sow's Ear. Other Upper Union Street business participating in the History & Heritage event will be identified by red balloons near their doorways on June 6. They are **Michael's Shoe Service**, **Simon's Men's Wear**, and **Musler's**.

A highlight of June 6 is a free historic tour of Upper Union Street, scripted with the help of local historian and former Upper Union Street businessman, **Bob Sweet**. Participants should meet at 11AM at the **Upper Union Street Farmers' Market** on Woodland Ave. The one hour tour will take in architecture, little know facts, and a brief history of some of the Upper Union Business Improvement District. Bob Sweet, a Past President of the Upper Union Street Business Association, is the former owner of **Tieman's Dry Cleaners** which is now **Hartz Family Dry Cleaners**, located at 1714 Union St.

Among the recently uncovered "historical" facts is a fascinating story told by Upper Union BID member, **Master Thomas Pai, of Pai's Taekwondo Academy** about a building he owns on the corner of Union St. and Keyes Ave. The former **Empire Market** building at 1625 Union Street, gained two stories and became an 8 unit apartment building with a storefront when a large house, once situated on the current **City Squire Restaurant** parking lot, was moved manually, using horses and pulleys and set atop the market on steel I beams. The property currently houses **Hot Harry's Burritos** and the **US Military Recruiting Center**.

As with the huge addition atop 1625 Union St., looking up at the rooflines of the buildings along Upper Union Street, helps one piece together some of the area's history. It is obvious that there was a trend during the early 1940s for a business owner to buy a two family home, turn the first floor into their shop and live upstairs. Among the many examples of this is **Michael's Shoe Service** at 1605 Upper Union St. The upstairs flat is where current owner Michael Mastroianni, the third generation of shoemakers in his family, grew up. The business originated in 1926 in the City's Stockade area across from the statue of Lawrence the Indian. The family business moved to Upper Union Street in 1949, and has been there ever since. Similarly, the upstairs space becomes offices as in the case of **Northeastern Fine Jewelry** whose corporate base is here on Upper Union Street above the store.

"Upper Union Street is a very solid business district," said BID Chair **Guy Sementilli**. "Many of our businesses, dating back to the Roaring Twenties, are still with us. Often when businesses do turn over it's to people who are already part of our business community. Me, for example! When I was in high school, I worked for at **Scotti's Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria**, the restaurant I now own here on Upper Union Street. Neighboring **Musler's Fine Women's Clothing**, founded downtown in 1926, has moved three times, twice within the Upper Union Street District. **Empress Travel**, **Gayne Optical**, **Home Style Pizza**, **Pizza Hut**, **Sondra's Fine Jewelry**, **AfterGlow Tanning**, **Pai's Tai Kwon Do** and **Salamack's** have also moved within the district to be close to their

customers as their needs for more space changed. It's a wonderful legacy, we are gaining market share; while retaining loyal customers and keeping long-standing BID member businesses right here."

Tracing through the history of Upper Union Street, an old clipping about the Way family home, at 1626 Union St., describes how one of the oldest Upper Landmarks, was razed in the early 1940's to be replaced by the Union **5&10** which had been located across the street. The Way's owned **Kipp's Coffee Shop** next door where **Sondra's Fine Jewelry**, 1624 Union, now. Sondra's building has had many lives between being **Kipp's and Sondra's, including Court Side Tennis Shop, Dottie Gallo's Sweet Tooth, and Troy Savings Bank** to name a few.

Visitors to the **Sow's Ear** on History & Heritage Day and throughout the month of June can look at historic photos, like that of the **Rivoli Theatre**, located at 1615 Union Street where Pai's Tai Kwon Do Academy is now. Next door where **Union Aquarium** is now, music lovers gathered during the early 1960's at Roth's, a jazz club in the basement of the old theatre.

The original **Salamack's**, at 1609 Union St. on the corner of Baker where **Lourdes Beauty Shop** is presently, was said to have a soda fountain AND a lending library. The present Salamack's at 1611 Union Street was the Economy Market. Along the way was **Union Bakery**, owned by long time Schenectady County Clerk, **Merritt Willey**. Bob Sweet recalled, "Niskayuna students used to hang out at the soda fountain at **Peter's Drug Store** where McDonald's is today; while city kids called **Barhyt's Pharmacy** their soda fountain of preference." Students also gravitated to **Green's Dairy**, near the Dean Street corner, where they lined up for homemade ice cream freshly made from milk from the Green family's nearby dairy farm.

Mr. Sweet, recalling how boys-will-be boys told how he and his friends would climb up a tree behind **Charles and Millie Eisenberg's old Union 5 & 10** and get on the roof, only to be shooed down by "Mr. E" remembered by Mr. Sweet recalled as a "swell guy." Sweet also remembered driving golf balls from behind the old Union 5 & 10 and trying to land them on the lawn of **St. Helen's Church**. That would be the original St. Helen's Church at 1620 Union Street, where **Trustco Bank** is presently. It's no longer there, but the original church is said to have been a Sears & Roebuck prefabricated kit structure.

There are many "used to be's" on Upper Union St. **Bernie's Buster Brown Shoes** used to be at 1725 Union where the old **Pizza Hut** was. The new Pizza Hut at 1638 Union used to be **Bunning the Florist** and was **Charley Boehm's** gas station before that. An **A&P** used to be at 1671 Union, the present location of **Simon's Men's Clothes**. **Gershon's** used to be **Dee's Deli** across the street from its present location.

The gray building at the Livingston Ave. corner had been **Mary Michael's**, a high end dress shop owned by **Mary Pedone** in the early 1960s. Another fine women's store was owned by **Bell Hagar** who also sold antiques from 1603 Union Street where **Ferri's Formals** is now.

Other business names that come up when talking about Upper Union Street are **White's Apothecary, Childhood Shop, The Quality Shop, Marie's Food Market, Tucker's Union Street Bake Shop, Gordon's Jewelry, William Zink Hardware, Dave's Children's Shop, and Doris Remis Florist Shop**. The Upper Union Street BID is interested in collecting photos and stories about Upper Union Street's history. The web site is [www.upperunionbid.org](http://www.upperunionbid.org). Contact may be made through [info@Upperunionbid.org](mailto:info@Upperunionbid.org).

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