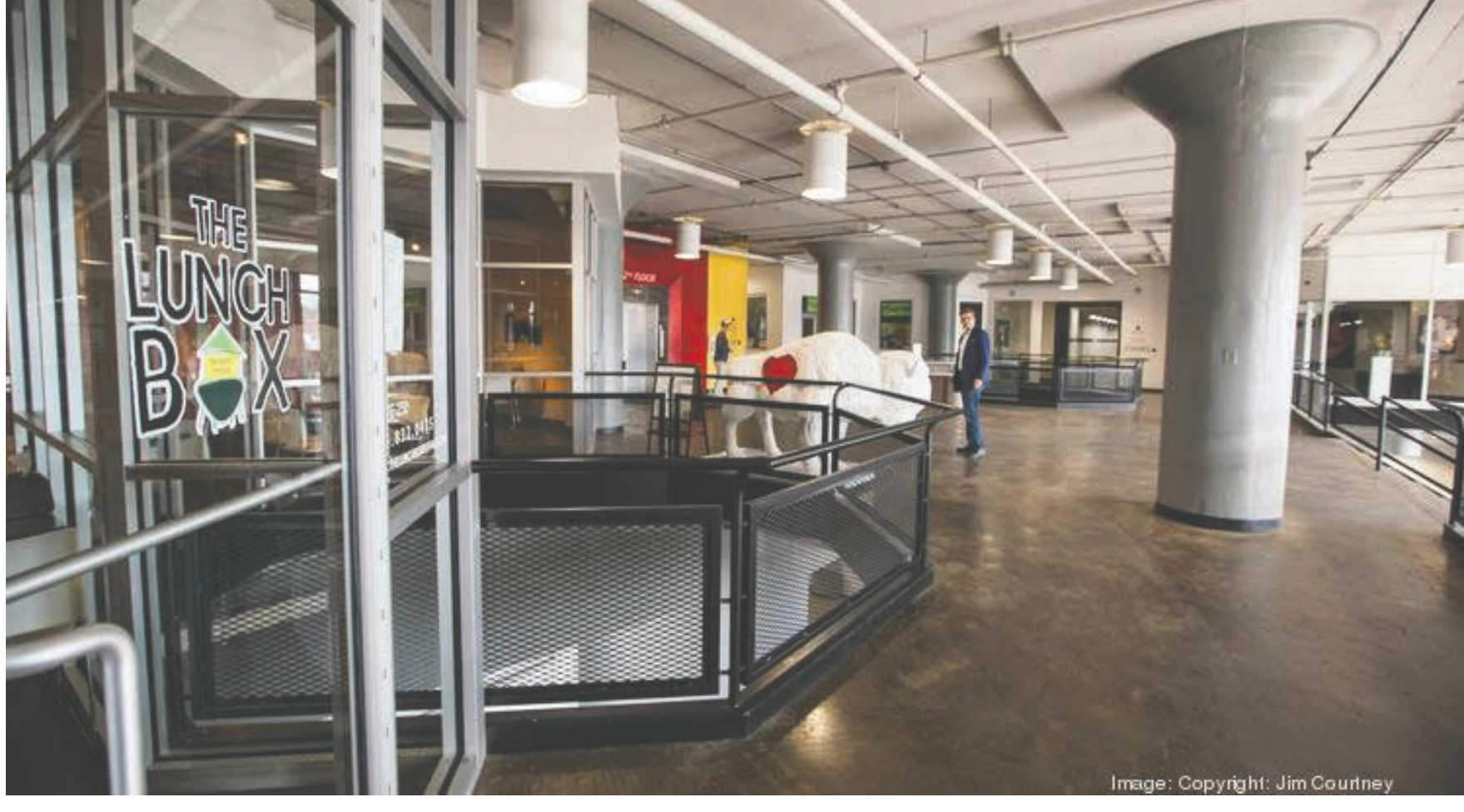


Central Park's community found in Tri-Main Center



The six-story Tri-Main Center evolved from a manufacturing hub into a complex with a range of tenants. In the lobby, above, is the Central Park location of the Lunch Box restaurant.

PHOTOGRAPHER: JIM COURTNEY

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Call it a community within a community. That's what has developed in the Tri-Main Center, an anchor in Buffalo's Central Park neighborhood.

It wasn't by design; it just happened naturally, said Matthew Wolfe, president of Tri-Main Development LLC.

"In a way, it has become something of a calling card for us," Wolfe said.



A tenant since 1995, BHNT Architects P.C. recently updated its reception area.

The six-story, 650,000-square-foot building was once a manufacturing plant for Ford Motor Co. and later for Trico Products Corp. Despite the expansive Main Street frontage, the building is almost hidden. Yet 92 percent of the space is leased and the occupancy rate is between 90 percent and 95 percent.

These days, the Tri-Main Center is home to more than 100 tenants, an eclectic mix of architectural firms, law offices, candy manufacturers, art studios and more.

"I'd say we have been a 25-year overnight success story," Wolfe said. "What's happened here has been very organic but it has also been a long, slow process."

His father, Elgin, who bought the former factory in 1988, lives in Collingwood, Ontario. He came from Toronto and was one of the first Canadians to invest in Buffalo commercial real estate after an aggressive economic development marketing campaign targeting Southern Ontario interests.

Elgin Wolfe opened Market on Main, a flea market patterned after ventures in Toronto. Market on Main lasted two years, ending in 1991.

He then focused on landing an assortment of tenants.

"When we started, we were looking for people to fill the space, which we had a lot of," said Matthew Wolfe, who became Tri-Main president in 2002. "Now what's happened is we have a Tri-Main community unto itself. The tenants feel like they are part of a small community or village. Not many buildings have that feeling."



Alma Carrillo, executive director of the Buffalo Arts Studio. She says there's "a sense of community" among the more than 100 tenants in the building.

The collaborative Buffalo Arts Studio was one of the first tenants and opened in 1991.

"For a visual arts center, this is the perfect building," said Alma Carrillo, executive director.

She said many artists who work in the studio have picked up commissioned work from Tri-Main Center tenants.

"They come looking to us for their artwork," Carrillo said.

Call it corporate matchmaking among tenants.

"We are always looking for ways to help bring our tenants together," Wolfe said.



Artist Fotini Galanes at the Buffalo Arts Studio.

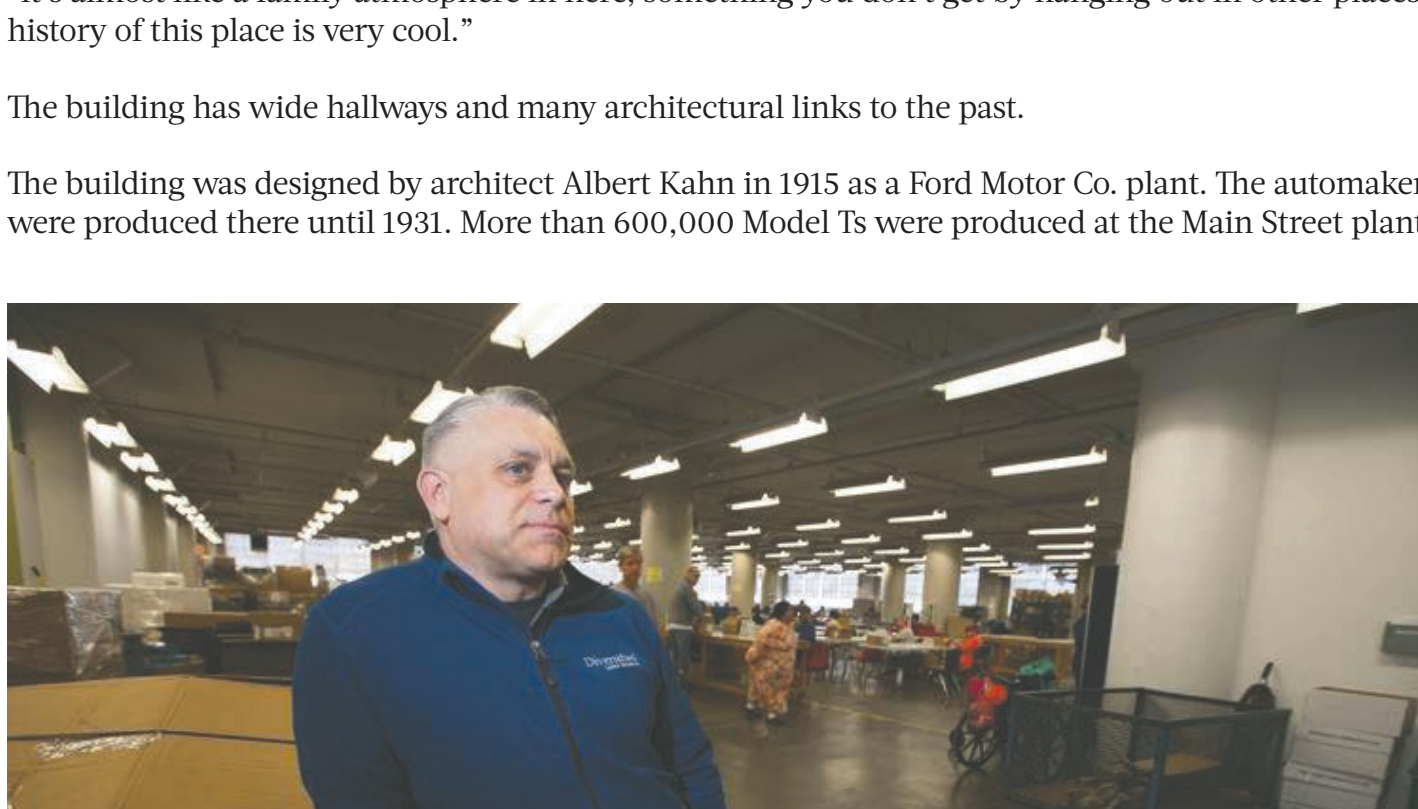
Murals and other works by Buffalo Arts Studio artists and others line many hallways.

"It gives us a very communal feeling," said Fotini Galanes, an artist who does abstract paintings. "We meet for coffee or lunch and we critique each other."

"It's almost like a family atmosphere in here, something you don't get by hanging out in other places," she said. "And the history of this place is very cool."

The building has wide hallways and many architectural links to the past.

The building was designed by architect Albert Kahn in 1915 as a Ford Motor Co. plant. The automaker's Model T and Model A were produced there until 1931. More than 600,000 Model Ts were produced at the Main Street plant.



Darren Lisicki, director of Diversified Labor Solutions.

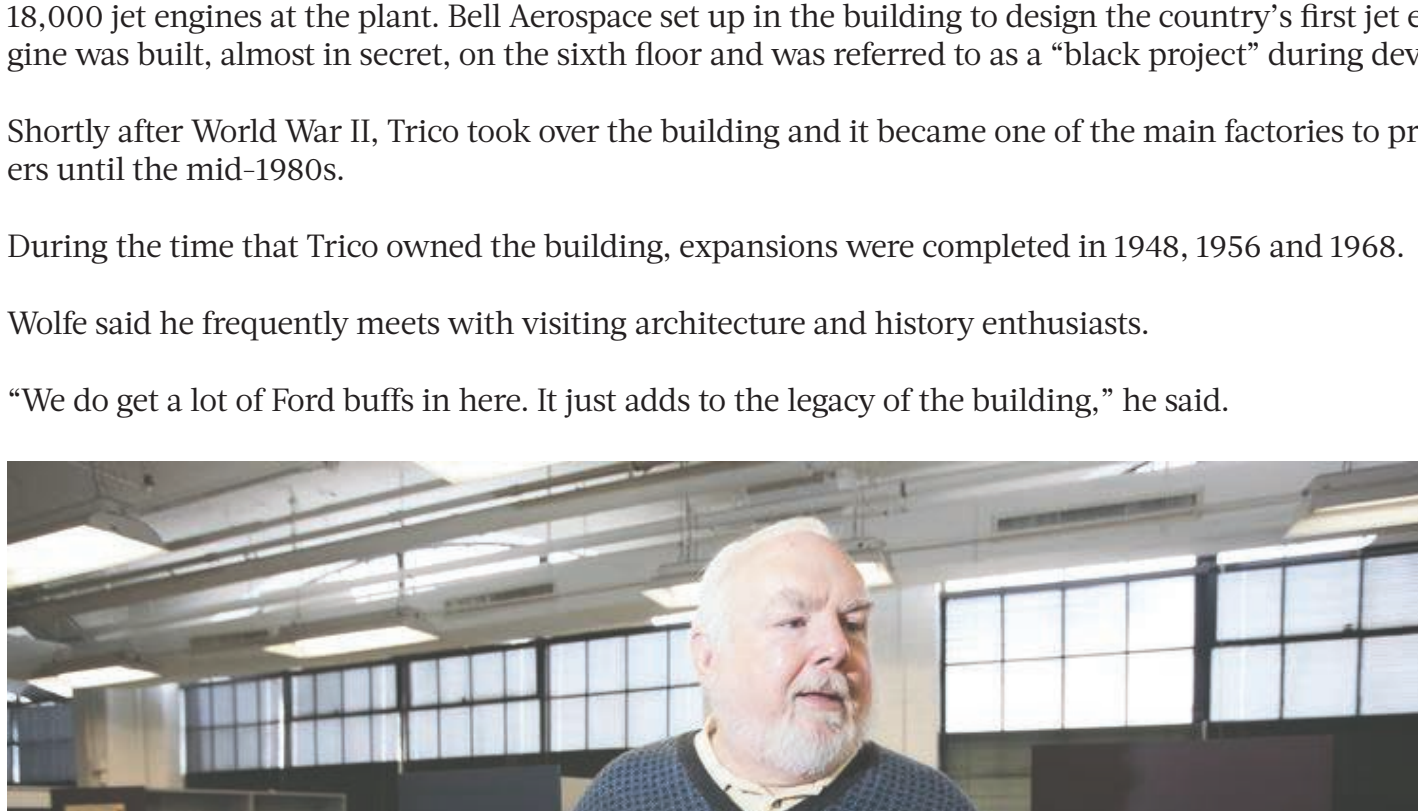
After Ford left, tenants included Hercules Engine Co. and Bell Aerospace. During World War II, Hercules annually produced 18,000 jet engines at the plant. Bell Aerospace set up in the building to design the country's first jet engine warplane. The engine was built, almost in secret, on the sixth floor and was referred to as a "black project" during development.

Shortly after World War II, Trico took over the building and it became one of the main factories to produce windshield wipers until the mid-1980s.

During the time that Trico owned the building, expansions were completed in 1948, 1956 and 1968.

Wolfe said he frequently meets with visiting architecture and history enthusiasts.

"We do get a lot of Ford buffs in here. It just adds to the legacy of the building," he said.



"This building lends itself to collaboration and creativity," said Bill Hovey, co-founder of BHNT Architects P.C., a tenant since 1995. "Architecturally, I love the progression and lines of the building."

Many tenants come to the Tri-Main Center via word-of-mouth, according to Wolfe. Landies Candies and In-Room Plus have been in the building since 1994. The Travel Team, a Rich Products Corp. affiliate, has been there since 1999.

The building has a mix of professional offices, cultural groups and social service agencies such as Journey's End, Deaf Adult Services and the Cantalician Center's Diversified Labor Solutions.

Clients of Diversified Labor Solutions include 3M Corp., for which the company packages sponges and other items. Company director Darren Lisicki said Diversified Labor Solutions has 100 employees who are disabled or have special needs and the workforce includes 150 refugees, most of whom were referred by Journey's End.

"What we love about this place is that our workers are not segmented out because of who they are," Lisicki said. "They are welcomed into the building like any other tenant, and that goes a long way toward giving them self-respect. They walk in the front door and feel like they are part of a community. That matters."

Greg Norton, president of digital marketing firm Twisted Rope, described the Tri-Main Center as millennial friendly with a "cool, funky atmosphere." He said that's important because most of his staff is under 30.

"That sense of culture, that sense of reusing an old industrial, old-school facility is actually very appealing to me and my staff," Norton said. "It helps with my recruitment. It helps with my employee retention."

The building's vibe is one reason why Teo Balbach, CEO of CoachMePlus, relocated from the Innovation Center on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus in January.

Balbach said he considered other Buffalo sites but the central location coupled with the architecture and tenant mix were selling points.

"This is such an unusual building," he said. "You just never know who you are going to see. It makes it very cool."