

Brunch-centric Jam
can't be beat

Metropolis, 11



A CHICAGO JOURNAL PUBLICATION

FREE

SKYLINE

September 3, 2009

NEWS OF LINCOLN PARK, OLD TOWN, RIVER NORTH AND GOLD COAST

IN THIS ISSUE

Gold Coaster fell off his bike ...

But he's getting back on Heart of the 'hood, 2

Two proposals for 2016 review

City council to discuss them next week 7



Baby solar steps

City lags on sun-based projects 8

Ryan: Insurance protects taxpayers

Olympics boss details policies 9

Crazy for your spouse

Ann Gerber 4



Calendar.....	11
Crossword.....	17
Heart of the 'hood.....	2
Hot Shots.....	15

Online at
SkylineNewspaper.com

FRANK PINCISLAK/Photographer



The Lakeshore Athletic Club is steeped in Chicago history and local lore, right down to the light fixtures.

Athletic club *reborn*

Demo idea brought protests. Now, group plans senior building

By IAN FULLERTON

Contributing Reporter

The building at 850 N. Lake Shore Drive, once home to the ritzy Lake Shore Drive Athletic Club, has faced closure, reuse and demolition over the last few decades.

STREETERVILLE Now, nearly a century since its original construction, one developer has laid plans to breathe new life into the historic

Streeterville structure.

Founded in the early 1920s, the athletic club was an extravagant playground for the city's young elite, where the privileged class came to meet and mingle, as well as get in shape. The facilities were lavished with a mural-adorned swimming pool, pink marble staircases and sterling silver chandeliers in the club's numerous dining rooms and lounges.

The heyday of the establish-

ment has long since passed, and membership ceased nearly five decades ago. Presently the 19-story building lies vacant, with most of the interior gutted.

Since purchasing the 375,000 square-foot property in early 2008, Northbrook-based Integrated Development Group has unveiled designs to redevelop the Beaux Arts-inspired building into a \$150

See **ATHLETIC CLUB** on Page 7

ATHLETIC CLUB

Continued from page 1

million urban retirement community.

"People have embraced what we're going to do," said the firm's CEO Matt Phillips.

The 128-unit development, slated for occupancy in 2012, will include assisted-living residences and staff, as well as dining, entertainment and athletic facilities for seniors over the age of 65.

The historic rehab will be a first for IDG. The firm has partnered with the National Electrical Benefit Fund and hired architecture firm Booth Hansen to ensure that the redevelopment goes smoothly.

Phillips said that the structure of the building itself has shown promise.

"It's got great bones, which is always a good thing to find," he said.

While most of the building's interior has been demolished, IDG has chosen to preserve two of the club's rooms. The Lake Shore dining room, with its terrazzo marble floors and white wall friezes; and the Lake Shore Club room, a wood-paneled social lounge with a marble fireplace as its centerpiece, are both set to be refurbished in the style of the original building.

"By all pictures, it will look very much like it did in the 1920s," said Jody Thurston, vice president of operations for IDG.

The building's rich history has made the redevelopment a hotly-debated subject for preservationists and residents alike.

In 1924, the club commissioned architect Jarvis Hunt to design and build the facility at 850 N. Lake Shore Drive. Hunt, a student of the classical French school of architecture, outfitted the club with exercise facilities, dining halls, social rooms and sleeping quarters designed to accommodate a younger membership than some of the city's older fitness establishments, like the Chicago Athletic Association and the Woman's Athletic Club of Chicago.

"It was an instant success," said Susan Benjamin, historian for the IDG redevelopment.

The club attracted a wide cross section of members — political, military and entertainment personalities from Chicago and elsewhere all came to take part in the social scene formed around the club, where guests were regularly treated to stylish galas and banquets.

Over the years, many notable characters frequented the club, such as World War I fighter ace Eddie Rickenbacker, U.S. Olympian Avery Brundage and even Mayor Richard J. Daley. Movie star Johnny Weissmuller, famously known for his role as Tarzan, was known to swing by.

"[The club] had a stunning classical presence," said Benjamin. "It was very elegant."

After struggling through the Depression, the club caught a second wind in the wake of World War II, but eventually closed in the mid-60s. In 1977, the building was purchased by Northwestern University and converted into student residences.

Three years ago, Northwestern closed the dorms and put the property out for bid. Several firms — including

IDG — answered with proposals, but eventually the Fifield Realty Company won the bid, and planned to demolish the building and put up a condominium development on the property.

Members of the community came out in droves to protest the decision, arguing that the building's historic significance should warrant protection from teardown.

"So many significant things happened in that building, and we felt it needed to be saved," said Gail Spreen, president of the Streeterville Organization of Active Residents.

Groups such as Preservation Chicago and Landmarks Illinois suggested landmarking as a way to safeguard the building from being razed, but no designation was ever made.



FRANK PONG/Staff Photographer

A chandelier and interior detailing hints at august past of the Lakeshore Athletic Club building, 850 N. Lake Shore Drive.

After conducting extensive deliberations with residents and preservationists, newly elected Alderman Brendan Reilly (42nd) told Fifield that demolishing the building was not an option. The firm walked away from the project in late 2007, and the property was again up for grabs.

"That's when we told them that we wanted back in," said Phillips.

IDG returned with their original proposal to preserve the terracotta exterior of the building while redeveloping the inside for senior living. This time Northwestern bit.

Spreen said that IDG's design for retirement housing was the plan Streeterville had been waiting for.

"We just thought that was great to have a use that was needed in the community and that suited the building," she said.

Jonathan Fine, president of Preservation Chicago, gave much credit to the alderman for seeing the deal through.

"That was sort of Reilly's test case," he said. "It was his preservation baptism by fire."

Fine said that while his group is pleased that the building will continue as a valuable resource, he is sorry to see some elements go, such as the club's pool room and the grand lobby.

"That's just the price you pay in a lot of preservation deals," he said.

IDG completed the interior demolition of the building in April, and Thurston said they hoped to begin restoring the building's exterior in the next few months, with construction on the new units starting next year.