

TAX CREDIT

FEDERAL DOLLARS IN SUPPORT OF PRESERVATION

HOTEL LAFAYETTE Once one of the nation's top hotels, Buffalo's Hotel Lafayette is undergoing a \$35 million rehab with the help of federal historic preservation tax credits. The seven-story Renaissance-style building—designed by Louise Blanchard Bethune, the nation's first professional female architect—was intended to accommodate tourists expected for the 1901 Pan-American Exposition, but financial setbacks delayed its opening until 1904. The Lafayette, conceived as an A-list destination, offered hot and cold running water and telephones for every guest. Just a few years after its opening, an addition doubled the occupancy. The hotel declined over the decades, utilized most recently for short-term emergency housing, among other uses. In its new incarnation, the Lafayette will include apartments, a one-stop wedding destination, and a boutique hotel. Like many prominent Buffalo buildings, it owes its second chance to the city's recent revitalization.

ALLING AND CORY WAREHOUSE Thanks to federal historic preservation tax credits, the Alling and Cory Warehouse—a 1910 industrial building in downtown Buffalo, abandoned in 2001—is slated to become a mix of studio and one-and-two-bedroom apartments. The building, a manifestation of the city's rise as an industrial power, is an early example of the use of reinforced concrete and a trend toward open space, the latter complementing its new use. The warehouse, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, was rehabilitated by Schneider Development LLC at a cost of \$15.5 million. Used by students of nearby Erie Community College, it projects to draw young people to the increasingly vibrant downtown, a renaissance fueled in part by the city's architectural charm and attractions like the Omsted-designed park system.

to qualify for tax credits The new use must be income producing, the structure certified as historic, and the rehab in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The credit equals 20 percent of the qualified rehab expenses. The National Park Service administers the tax credit program with IRS.

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Delaware Avenue Church >>

It is one of Buffalo's finest examples of ecclesiastical architecture, listed in the National Register of Historic Places and rescued from the fate of so many 19th-century American churches, thanks in good measure to recording artist and native Ani DiFranco. Delaware Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, designed by local architect John Selkirk, is a landmark High Victorian Gothic structure that visually dominates the neighborhood, significant for what the National Register calls its "high artistic value." Once



facing the wrecking ball, the church has been rehabilitated as a state-of-the-art concert venue (DiFranco on stage, right) and offices for her record company, the \$10 million project accomplished thanks to federal historic preservation tax credits. The church was built in two phases, the 1871 chapel first, the rest between 1874 and 1876. A place of such artistry was fitting for a

city on the rise. Buffalo was the western terminus of the Erie Canal, which transformed it from a village into the way station for much of the commerce between the East Coast and the interior of the country. By 1830 it was the nation's leading inland port, the shipbuilding capitol of the Great Lakes. With the Industrial Revolution, Buffalo became a center for manufacturing and heavy industry. But by the 1870s, older parts of the city were no longer desirable and a fashionable neighborhood sprung up along Delaware Avenue. The congregation approached Selkirk, who had already shaped much of the downtown. High Victorian Gothic was at its peak. Featuring aspects of the earlier Gothic Revival, its visual extravagance was not restricted to places of worship but also animated museums, banks, courthouses, and other public buildings. Selkirk was a prime purveyor of the style. His design of the church captured the style's essence, in the words of the National Register nomination combining "a richly textured gothic exterior with an auditorium-like worship space rooted in the Protestant meeting house tradition. The integration of these historically opposed design approaches into a visually and functionally cohesive church building is emblematic of the picturesque tastes and architectural

ABOVE: Foliated finials inside Buffalo's renovated Delaware Avenue Church. **RIGHT:** Recording artist Ani DiFranco, a city native and key player in the renovation, performs in the space.



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ABOVE © JIM BUSH, ABOVE RIGHT LORI JOYCE



RECHRISTENED AS “BABEVILLE,” THE FORMER CHURCH, ACCORDING TO DIFRANCO’S WEBSITE, SERVES AS “A SHINING EXAMPLE OF HOW HISTORIC PRESERVATION WORKS IN BUFFALO.”

creativity of the Victorian era.” The stained glass was made by a local firm, Booth and Reister. The church’s decline paralleled that of the avenue, widened in 1924 for development. Many trees were lost that gave the road its character, along with a number of buildings. When the Depression hit, a long exodus began. The population decreased, and places emptied. While the church was home to other congregations, none had the money to maintain it, and it was finally acquired by the city. As stones began falling from the tower and façade, the church was slated for demolition. A coalition of activists, preservationists, and residents mobilized to save it. DiFranco and Righteous Babe Records, her record company, helped organize a group to preserve the church, halting the demolition and raising funds to assist the city with emergency repairs. DiFranco and Scot Fisher, her record company’s president, offered to buy the church, transforming it into offices and a performance venue. The pair paid for the rehabilitation of the interior, plus maintenance, with the city handling the exterior repair and structural stabilization. The church is now a first-rate concert hall, seating 500 on the floor and another 300 in the balconies. It is also rented out for lectures, receptions, business gatherings, and celebrations. The Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center has a space, including a gallery and film-screening room. Rechristened as “Babeville,” the former church, according to DiFranco’s website, serves as “a shining example of how historic preservation works in Buffalo.”

LEFT: Stage at the restored church. ABOVE: Tables set up for an event.