

# Restorative rescue

The long-awaited restoration of the Garver Feed Mill is mostly complete, but creating this sustainable destination, even after a development vision emerged, was not a walk in Olbrich Park.

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*From the pages of In Business magazine.*

Madison's east side can sometimes be the forgotten stepchild when it comes to local redevelopment, but with the completion of Phase I of the Garver Feed Mill redevelopment project, the east side has a new crown jewel to boast about.

After more than two decades of neglect and predictable decay, polishing this gem didn't come easy. All redevelopment projects have their special challenges and confront an occasional barrier related to cost, financing, or scheduling, but when a developer such as Baum Revision and a local contractor such as Bachmann Construction are refurbishing a historic building, those challenges are magnified.

The Garver Feed Mill, renamed after James Garver purchased it in 1929, is located on a five-acre site behind Olbrich Botanical Gardens. Originally built in 1906, its use by the United States Sugar Co., which refined beets into sugar there, and then as Garver Feed and Supply Co., which provided livestock feed to farmers in Wisconsin and northern Illinois, make it historically significant from both manufacturing and agricultural perspectives.

Yet from the time the feed mill closed down and the city of Madison purchased the property in the mid 1990s, it took more than a decade for a development focus to emerge; when it did, the Great Recession helped kill it in the crib. “There was always a desire to do something with the building, but as is always the case when there are competing priorities, it never rose to the top of the priority list,” recalls Matt Mikolajewski, director of the city’s economic development division. “Around the 2007 timeframe, there was an RFP and some discussion with Common Wealth Development around an arts incubator, and then that didn’t progress forward.”

In recent years, city policymakers realized they either had to redevelop the the building or tear it down because it was starting to crumble. When the redevelopment ball finally got rolling, the building’s transformation into an artisan food facility with public access had to be completed in accordance with state and national park preservation standards so that it could be registered as a national landmark. That’s where Bachmann Construction came in.

Bachmann Construction, a local family owned construction firm with experience in historic restoration, was selected by Baum Revision as the general contractor on the project. The Bachmann team was tasked with restoring the building’s interior and exterior masonry, roof, and floors, and it had to develop something compatible with nearby Olbrich Botanical Gardens. Watching closely was the National Historic Register, the City of Madison Historic Preservation Office, and other historic-preservation groups.

To gain an understanding of Garver’s redevelopment challenges, we spoke to Mikolajewski and the following project players: Al Bachmann, president of Bachmann Construction; Chris Quandt, senior project manager, Bachmann Construction, who called Garver the most unique project on which he’s ever worked; Naomi Kroth, project manager and vice president of marketing for Bachmann Construction, who is handling the build outs for several women-owned businesses at Garver; Bryant Moroder, project manager for Baum Revision, the Chicago-based developer that acquired the decaying mill from the city and invested nearly \$20 million to convert it into an artisan food production facility; and Madison alder Marsha Rummel, whose east-side district contains the Garver site.

## Redevelopment reflux

In the first decade after the feed mill closed, it was damaged by a fire accidentally set by kids, and it was beaten down by weather, occasional vandalism, and neglect. Prior to the 2015 RFP process that produced Baum’s artisan-food vision, the most serious attempt to develop the site was the proposed arts incubator, and when that fell through, the building’s future remained in limbo for several years. At one juncture, public funding for its demolition was put in the city budget.

By early 2014, the city of Madison was ready to accept proposals from developers interested in renovating Garver. The city established several conditions for those interested in revitalizing the property, including a requirement that all proposals remain sensitive to the needs of the neighborhood and

the adjacent Olbrich Botanical Gardens.

In March of that year, Baum Revision's vision won the support of the Garver Feed Mill Criteria and Selection Committee, which voted to approve Baum's \$19.8 million redevelopment plan. In April 2015, the full city council chose Baum's plan over three others, including a \$39.8 million senior housing option from Alternative Continuum of Care, which was selected as a backup plan.

Several delays and deadline extensions ensued to push back the groundbreaking, but Phase I has finally been completed, with Phase II "micro-lodges" still being planned on adjacent land. The core Phase I renovation encompasses 60,000 square feet of space, including a 13,500-square-foot atrium for public events.

When Chris Quandt first heard that he was going to be the Garver project manager, he greeted the news with a mix of excitement and apprehension. A native of Milwaukee, which has many such buildings, Quandt knew Madison had no other buildings like Garver. "I was ecstatic, I was excited, and I still am because it's an incredible project. So, as a project manager, what went through my mind was 'Oh, this is incredible' and then 'Oh, my goodness, how are we going to do this?'"

Moroder, a former executive director for Sustain Dane, had some anxious moments of his own. Initially, the sale of Garver from the city of Madison to Baum Revision was expected to close by December 2016, but that did not happen because the negotiations were more complex than first anticipated. In fact, the closing was pushed back several months.

Asked to identify his worst day during the redevelopment process, Moroder instead cited his worst time period — the challenge of getting the project off the ground. The winter of 2017-18 was approaching, and Baum



**The before-and-after reality of the Garver Feed Mill building demonstrates the challenge contractors had in transforming a decaying building into a modern facility for food artisans and consumers alike.**

Revision wanted to preserve as much of the exterior brick as possible before the cold weather arrived. “Closing on the property was a complex proposition, and the rehab could not begin until Baum technically owned the property,” Moroder says. “By September 2017, we were ready, but we still hadn’t closed.”

Oddly enough, the worst day for Al Bachman was probably two weeks after his firm started the project in December 2017, at least six months later than it wanted to, and with a great deal of exterior restoration to do. It didn’t make for a happy situation. “We didn’t get clearance to start until Dec. 2, and it actually was a nice day — 60 degrees. Two weeks later, a massive cold front came through and so the project got delayed; the construction end of the project got delayed almost from the beginning,” he recalled. “That set us back throughout the project in terms of completion and being able to turn it over to the owner in the spring of 2019, which is what we had committed to. It finished a couple of months late, so the first two weeks of the project were disappointing, knowing that we were starting an exterior project in the winter time, but it all turned out well.”

At about the same time, there was another source of anxiety from the political realm. In November 2016, the surprise election of Donald Trump to the presidency created some uncertainty about the availability of \$2.5 million in New Market Tax Credits, which was the last piece of the financing for Baum Revision and perhaps the biggest hurdle to clear. With the Trump administration poised to pursue a tax-reform legislation, Baum and Bachmann initially were uncertain how these tax credits would survive the reform effort.

By January 2017, the city informed Baum that it wanted all of its financing shored up by the end of February. Baum had been trying to secure the tax credits since November of the previous year, and had the tax credits not been available, the city’s second choice for the site — the senior housing complex — remained a viable option.

The answer came just in the nick of time, as Baum secured the tax credits, and along with a previously awarded \$500,000 industrial grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp., some funding from the city, and its own resources, the firm now was armed with all the financing required. It could move forward with plans to breathe life back into Garver.

“It took a long time for Baum to get the tax credits,” Quandt notes, “and without those tax credits, my understanding is the project would not have happened.”

As Kroth notes, the worst thing that can happen to a development is for the financing to falter after it’s approved. That’s basically what happened to the arts incubator. “My understanding is that when the recession happened, the money and financing dried up, but at least construction was not halfway through when financing fell apart,” she says. “So, as a contractor, what you’re really worried about is that you’re halfway through a project and suddenly something happens.”

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Several more issues would surface over the project's 15-month construction period. The project ran smack into the economic disruption being caused by the trade war between the U.S. and China, which impacted the price of steel needed for construction projects. Tariffs and retaliatory tariffs can impact scheduling and cost projections, and while that was the case here, Bachmann was able to use a combination of stress-tested, reclaimed steel and new steel for the interior trusses, some of which extend almost 40 feet high. Some of the reclaimed steel was used on an exterior bench, and the new main entry is clad with sheets of steel that previously had been part of bins used to store grain.

"That [trade dispute] impacted us," Quandt states. "The steel pricing went up and down, and vendors, particularly steel vendors, wouldn't hold their pricing for long. So that affected us already with this project. Given the hurdles we already had, that was something to deal with, but it wasn't our biggest issue."

Meanwhile, the historic nature of the building added several layers of bureaucratic oversight and complexity. There were strict restrictions on restoring a historic building, as the National Historic Registry required approvals for 29 historic windows, plus railings, brick, and more from various historic-preservation groups. Since nothing can be placed in front of historic windows, which limits what developers are allowed to put on walls, that affected where the electrical could go, where fixtures could go, and where ductwork could go.

"We had to follow the dictates of the National Park Service because it is a registered historic landmark," Kroth says. "So, anything we were restoring had to go through the approval process. We had to submit our masonry mockups, so there are actually parts of the building where we used five different types of mortar and we asked which one do you like best? And they had to tell us which one they thought matched."



Since all the windows had to be historic windows, vendor options were limited because there are only a couple of places in the entire country that make historic windows, “and so those took nine months to get to us,” Kroth adds. “The cost was a known thing ahead of time, but the nine months — that dictated our project schedule. We had to order them way ahead at the beginning of the project.”

Historic guidance covered almost everything, even the placement of things inside. “We had to infill an opening between two spaces,” Korth notes. “Well, historic said you shall not put the brick flush to the wall. Since it’s not a historic infill, we have to set the brick back so that it doesn’t look like a historic infill. It has to be obvious that it was infilled later.”

“You can’t falsify history,” Quandt adds.

That doesn’t mean there isn’t room for interpretation, however, and that was evident in the treatment of Garver’s roof structure and ceiling. From a practical standpoint, the right ceiling solution was sheets of plywood milled with grooves that give the plywood the appearance of the individual boards that were up there historically. Plywood would have to be used even if historical arbiters demanded individual boards — an unnecessary duplication — and at the suggestion of an engineer, contractors convinced the influential Jen Davel, an architect with the Wisconsin Historical Society’s Historic Preservation Division, that the “groovy” alternative would meet the historic spirit of the building.

“We ran it by historical, and they were really very good,” Quandt states. “The lady in town here, Jen Davel, she’s great. We’ve worked with her on many projects. She’s a real person. She doesn’t just go, ‘This is what the book says.’ She goes, ‘You know, that’s good. That will work.’”



**The different sides of Garver: The refurbished brick that visitors see on the exterior of the renovated Garver Feed Mill building was reclaimed from a local source — the former French Battery building at Union Corners. The entrance (lower left) features a combination of reclaimed steel and railroad rods.**

A fair amount of press coverage was devoted to soil contamination found on the site, but given its previous industrial uses, developers had a good idea there would be some need for environmental remediation. While the city had to invest \$1.6 million in the soil cleanup, the contamination wasn't nearly severe enough to warrant EPA Superfund-level attention, which would have further delayed completion.

Discovery of the contaminated soil prompted the city and Baum Revision to conduct further studies, but the issue did not threaten the project. Madison's Finance Committee approved \$75,000 for more study by SCS Engineers and with Homburg Contractors to deliver 9,000 cubic yards of clean topsoil to cap contaminated soils.

Among the better days of the redevelopment period was the confirmation of a local source for some of the bricks that were used in the restoration, courtesy of 70,000 bricks from the former French Battery building at Union Corners. At the start of the project, Bachmann didn't know if it would be able to obtain the bricks from Union Corners because they were being held by another developer for potential use on a different project. At first, Bachmann looked to source the historical brick it needed from a Chicago brick salvage yard, and that brick would have been historically accurate because it was fired in the same era and was a match in both color and character.

But even as the project team made several trips to Chicago to inspect that potential supply of masonry, they monitored the Union Corners brick because it's always better to source as locally as possible and because they, too, offered the same character and color match. Kroth described the eventual availability of local brick as "icing on the cake" because, in her words, it gave the Garver restoration "just a little more soul" and because it makes the story of the building even richer.

For Mikolajewski, one of the best days of the redevelopment was early on, when contractors were in process of starting to restore the brick on the building. Mikolajewski was out at the site when crews had tuck-pointed in some new replacement brick for some of the bricks that had failed, and the contractor had done such a good job that you would have never known which bricks were the old bricks and which bricks were the new bricks. "So, it was very evident that wow, this is actually happening!" he recalls. "We're taking this building that we were afraid was about to fall down, and here the wall is back to being completely structurally sound, and it looks beautiful and nobody would ever have known, looking at it now, the state that it was in before."

The Union Corners brick may have given Garver more soul, but they were fortunate that some on-site bricks did not create a soul-crushing obstacle. Upon entering the atrium, visitors see a spacious concrete floor, but the "underneath story" had Quandt reaching for some pain relief.

Contractors discovered three feet of brick fill under 70 percent of the old floor. That brick fill had to be removed to make room for plumbing lines that had to be installed before the new concrete floor could be poured. It was another one of those "good grief" moments, although Quandt had a more off-color way to put it. "The underground stuff, that was a pain in the butt," he states. "To discover that under this floor, that there is three feet of brick fill, and so if you want to run a plumbing line underneath here, you can't do that easily."

Crews had to dig out all that brick, put in gravel, and compact it before installing the plumbing lines and pouring the new floor. The brick had to be removed because if there is a plumbing line coming from say, a beer tapper to another point, crews can't just cut the concrete, dig out a little bit of brick, and then install a line because there is still potential settling on that brick, Quandt explains. Moreover, what happens if a pipe breaks

underneath the concrete? Then, you've got a mess, so you have to dig out the brick, put in gravel, install the pipes, and put gravel on top of the pipes, and then you can re-pour the concrete floor.

Worse still, none of that brick could be used for the building restoration, but while its removal was difficult and costly for the developer, at least it wasn't threatening anybody's life or limbs. Most sleepless nights were due to the danger of putting workers' lives at risk in an unstable, century-old building. Think of the challenge involved with demolishing old walls with no roof overhead to provide stability. Since the building was slowly crumbling, Bachmann had to take extra safety precautions for workmen.

At one point, the back wall of the space now occupied by NessAlla Kombucha collapsed. Crews were trying to shore it up, but before they could get everything in place, it buckled out from the bottom. Fortunately, it happened in the evening and on the weekend, so nobody was there and nobody was hurt. "There were dangerous things on this site," Kroth states. "The roof was gone. I mean, it had been on fire years ago, and it was rotting. So, just in terms of when we were moving throughout the building, we had to be very careful with what we were doing."

Another challenge was vandalism. Throughout the project, there was roughly \$100,000 to \$150,000 in damage done to equipment and the building. For so many years, it was a place where people would come "to either tag stuff or party," Quandt states, and those habits continued during the renovation. A site fence and cameras were installed to help police the site, and security personnel came by each night, but rogue visits didn't stop until the project approached completion.

"I think that's completely stopped, but it was a problem, especially at the beginning," Quandt says. "One of the subcontractors had all of their equipment here. People jammed dirt into their key slots, broke gauges, and broke windows on bulldozers."

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## Next chapter

At the moment, it's hard to find anyone who believes that developers missed the mark at Garver when it comes to creating a sustainable platform for food-based business in Madison. In a sense, the building has become the modern, human version of a feed mill where local food-and-beverage makers synergistically create their products.

In addition to an Ian's Pizza location, Garver is already the home of food-and-beverage related tenants such as: Sitka Salmon Shares, Madison's first Community Supported Fishery (CSF); Surya Café, a vegan restaurant; and Calliope Ice Cream, Ledger Coffee Roasters, and Underground Catering. Garver's very first tenant was NessAlla Kombucha, a local kombucha brewing company that uses its Garver location strictly for production and distribution.



Other businesses that have set up shop at Garver are: Twig & Olive, a locally owned wedding, family, and newborn photography business; Perennial East, a yoga studio; Briar Loft, a boutique floral business; and Kosa Spa, a health and wellness spa.

**It just so happens that the new Garver Feed Mill building is located off a local bike path, so it attracts cyclists and exercise enthusiasts along with various onlookers, and several of the new businesses inside have a fitness theme.**

Phase II of the project could bring the construction of 50 free-standing "micro-lodges," which are mini-homes that will be operated as a hotel. The Madison College construction program is building the mostly "tiny" houses that will be available for rent. The vision is for tiny homes that will be used for eco-tourist lodging, enabling visitors to stay in a 300-square-foot tiny home for a night or two on the east side of Madison, and walk to the Barrymore, perhaps kayak in the Starkweather Creek, or stroll through Olbrich Botanical Gardens.

"They will be for hospitality," Moroder confirmed. "The units will have amenities similar to a hotel room, including a small kitchenette."

During the project, Baum worked with James Gubbins from Momentum Art Tech in Madison to identify creative ways to incorporate street art into the project. Many of the bricks from Union Corners featured graffiti, and the developers succeeded in maintaining some of the artwork at Garver. Walk up the stairway to Garver's long mezzanine level and examine the roof at Ian's. You'll see an example of how Garver is a creative outlet for street artists.

"My favorite part is that they left the spray paint cans up there,"



Kroth notes.

Ian's opening day overload, in which hundreds of lunchtime visitors descended upon the new Ian's location in the renovated Garver Feed Mill, causing the restaurant to close, is a particularly good sign. "My best day during the redevelopment was the day it opened, and the public demand overwhelmed Ian's Pizza, which was sold out in three hours," Moroder states. "It was a clear indication of the public's interest in this renovated building."

Another positive indication comes from Madison alder

**This historic sign marking the entrance of Garver Feed Mill's atrium summarizes the 113-year-old building's historic use as a factory where beets were refined into sugar and as a livestock feed mill for Midwestern farmers.**

Marsha Rummel, who surprisingly had not received many comments about Garver by late September, even though it had been open for nearly a month. When an alder's constituents get in touch, it's usually to reach the complaint department, so no noise was good noise.

"They are really just starting to embrace the building and use it," Rummel says. "I've been there a few times when there was a really long line for Ian's Pizza, so I think people are just really interested. It will take a while for people to know how to get to it. It's not a building that you can see from the street, so it will take a while to reach its peak beyond the immediate neighborhood."

## Garver restoration Is Bachmann's second milestone

The word retirement is most closely associated with birthday number 65, but for Bachmann Construction, the company's 65th anniversary is worthy of toasting for a much different reason. The design-build firm's 65th birthday happens to coincide with the completion of its most high-profile project to date, the restoration of the historic Garver Feed Mill.

For Al Bachmann, president of Bachmann Construction, completion of the restoration project is a most fitting way to celebrate Bachmann's 65 years as a family-owned, Madison-based business. Historic restoration is one of the firm's specialties, and the Garver project joins a list that includes renovation projects at the Capitol, Olin House, University Club, and several area churches and restaurants.

When you pursue historic renovation, there is usually stiff competition for such projects. The winning bid was granted to Baum Revision, a Chicago-based developer that chose

Bachmann as the local subcontractor. "I always say in our business that you win a few and you lose all the rest," Al Bachmann states. "So, if it had not come through, we would have been fine. Happily, we are in a good economic culture and climate right now."

Accepting the Garver rehab required Bachmann Construction to turn away projects that it otherwise would have undertaken. It spread the firm a little thin from a manpower standpoint, so if it had not happened, Bachmann maintains it would not have had a significant financial impact on the firm.

Yet for a business that prides itself on historic renovation, it would have been a significant lost opportunity. "We've done a lot of good-sized projects, some for the state and some for private entities, but this is far and away the largest historic renovation project we've ever done," Bachmann says. "I dare say, it might very well be the largest historic renovation project ever done in the city of Madison. With the exception of the State Capitol restoration, I don't think there has been a project undertaken of this size or this magnitude."

Needless to say, the Garver restoration is a nice feather in Bachmann's hat, one that's nice to have in the firm's portfolio. Had development never occurred, it's very possible the



building would have been torn down and replaced with new development. So, it maintains a little niche and a segment of Madison history that otherwise might have gone away.

Bachmann Construction is an east-side business and Garver is an attraction on the east side, an area that was languishing just a bit. As Bachmann notes, the east side typically has trailed behind the west side of Madison, not in terms of attention from the city, but in terms of private development. To him, it's high time the east side had a focal point for economic growth. The newly renovated Garver Feed Mill fills the bill.



Bachmann will never forget the moment, toward the very end of the project, when he walked into the large atrium area and got a good look at everything from the atrium space to the grand ceiling heights to the upper mezzanine-level walkway. “I really see it as a vibrant little hub there, off the beaten path, that’s going to be a draw for both the local populace, as well as people from the outside — a tourist destination.”