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Columbus' Historic Union Depot Reopens as \$5M Residential and Office Hub

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A 124-year-old train depot in Columbus, Georgia, has been brought back to life in a \$5 million redevelopment led by local real estate developer and attorney Ken Henson. The project has turned the former Union Depot into a modern space with apartments, offices, and an event area, preserving a piece of local history while giving it a new purpose.

Originally built in 1901, the depot at 1200 Sixth Avenue once served as a train station for the Central Railroad of Georgia, Seaboard Airline Railroad, and Southern Railroad Company. It was active until 1969, moving both people and goods across the region. After train

services ended, the building was used by businesses like TSYS (Total System Services) and the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce.

According to public property records, Henson purchased the building in 2023 through Union Station LLC for \$1.1 million. Despite being warned by others not to invest in the project, he moved forward with restoring the depot. “I came over, and I tried to get anybody to buy it,” Henson told the Ledger-Enquirer. “People were saying, ‘Don’t put all this into this thing.’ Others said to a school or an old folks home. I just didn’t think those were good uses.”

Now called Union Station, the building includes 16 office spaces, 15 apartment units, and one event space still in development. The apartments rent from \$1,000 to \$1,700 per month, not including utilities. Fourteen of the units are one-bedrooms, ranging from 700 to 1,000 square feet. The only two-bedroom apartment is 1,200 square feet. Office spaces rent between \$400 and \$1,000 monthly, depending on size, which ranges from 68 to 432 square feet. Interested tenants can contact RAM Partners online to apply.

This marks Henson’s tenth historic renovation in Columbus, with previous projects including the City Mills Hotel and the former Coca-Cola bottling plant. He encourages other developers to consider restoring older buildings, noting the process isn’t as complicated as it may seem. “You can just fill out the forms and show the National Park Service in Georgia what you propose to do, and typically, they approve it,” he said. “In the end, they try to do the same thing you are, which is to preserve the historical look and feel of the building.”

The renovation kept many original features, such as the high ceilings, exposed brick walls, and natural light, while updating the interior for modern use. Each unit is unique, which created some challenges during construction. “I was over here one day, and I was asking the sheet rocker how it was going,” Henson said. “He said, ‘This is the worst job I’ve ever been on. Everything is different.’ Nothing is uniform.”

Keeping the exterior look and maintaining the historic feel were key goals for Henson. “If we were to come in and gut everything and put modern glass windows on here, it wouldn’t have the same look. It wouldn’t have the same feel,” he said.

Union Station now runs on solar power, a choice Henson said made both environmental and financial sense. “The solar power will hopefully provide power for the HVAC and lights for the big common area, all the offices, and the event space,” he said. “With the tax credits, it really helps. Why not? Economically, it works.”

While the event space is still being planned, Henson hopes it will serve the community by hosting lectures, game nights, and more. He believes the success of this project builds on decades of work by others to bring life back to downtown Columbus. “You can go back to when Harry Kamensky started the renovation project on First Avenue and the Springer and the Iron Works and what was the Hilton, which is now the Marriott,” Henson said. “All that is what’s making all this possible.. You couldn’t do this if all that hadn’t happened.”

For Henson, this work is more than business; it’s something he enjoys. “Some people want to play with a golf club,” he said. “I don’t play golf. I think I’d go nuts. I’m really lucky that I can do this and have fun.”

With strong interest from the community already, Henson says he’s feeling good about the decision. “It just reaffirms that this was a good idea,” he said.