



Union Depot benefactors in town to see results

Director's interest
in preserving
significant
buildings led to grant

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Two of the three directors of the Jeffris Family Foundation, Tom Jeffris and Roman Vetter, were in Keokuk on Thursday to see first hand the results of the restoration of the Keokuk Union Depot.

The Depot has undergone a major transformation since the City of Keokuk acquired it in 2011, and the hard work of a core group of dedicated volunteers, with financial assistance and support from the Jeffris Family Foundation, has made the Depot functional once again.

Keokuk Union Depot Foundation President Janet Smith noted, "The waiting room has been returned to its cathedral-like grandeur and serves as a wonderful venue for public and private events of all kinds. The Depot now has a roof that will protect it for another century. Moreover, a significant piece of Keokuk's architectural and historical heritage has been preserved to accommodate a new, useful purpose."

Jeffris said his interest in preservation led to his desire to focus the goals of the Foundation on nationally significant buildings in smaller communities in the Midwest.

"I have been pleasantly surprised at how smaller cities come together and raise money for matching grants," Jeffris added.

Smith said the Jeffris Family Foundation granted a challenge grant to the Keokuk Union Depot Foundation (KUDF) in June, 2014, to restore the Depot's



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Directors of the Jeffris Family Foundation, Tom Jeffris and Roman Vetter, visited the Keokuk Union Depot with members of the Keokuk Union Depot Foundation on Thursday to see the results of the massive restoration effort. Pictured from left are Richard Leonard, Joyce Taylor, Mary Jo Scheetz, Director Tom Jeffris, Carla Celania, Director Roman Vetter, Bob Woodburn, KUDF President Janet Smith, Mike Hickey and Steve Celania.

roof to its original height and design.

"KUDF raised the \$667,000 match by the Depot's 125th anniversary on July 1, 2016, earning the Jeffris \$333,000 award toward the project.

The match was raised with contributions from over 400 individuals, over 30 banks and businesses, the State of Iowa Historical Resource Development Program, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and numerous local and national foundations," she said.

"Individual donations in smaller communities help hold past treasures in trust for future generations," stated Vetter.

The Depot, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was designed by the renowned Chicago architectural firm of Burnham and Root, and is one of few Burnham and Root train depots still in existence. It is believed to be the last building designed by



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One of the wonders of the restoration of the Keokuk Union Depot is the extremely steep roof, now covered in tile. Pictured with it soaring upward behind them are, from left, Richard Leonard, KUDF President Janet Smith, Jeffris Family Foundation Directors Roman Vetter and Tom Jeffris, and Bob Woodburn.

DEPOT: It was challenging and restored in three stages

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John Root, who died six months before the Depot's completion in 1891.

According to Smith, the Depot roof was a particular challenge and was restored in three stages.

"In 2015 the eaves, brackets and chimney were restored to help support the clay tile roof to be installed. In 2016, the central tower, cut off in the late 1950s, was restored to its original height and design with turrets and dormers," she said. "Installation of the remaining

tile roof was begun in 2017 and finished in 2018."

Based in Janesville, Wis., the Jeffris Family Foundation provides historic preservation challenge grants, by invitation only, to restore architecturally significant structures located in small towns in the Midwest. "My strong interest in this project was partly because the building was designed by Root, a nationally known architect," remarked Jeffris, "and it is wonderful to see the beautiful results."

"The Keokuk Union Depot Commission and the Keokuk Union Depot Foundation are

assessing the next steps for additional preservation and restoration projects," said Smith. "Rental income keeps its doors open and pays for heat, air conditioning, lighting, and general maintenance. No City of Keokuk funds are used to restore or maintain the Depot."

For more information on the Depot, go to keokukuniondepot.org. For more information about the Jeffris Family Foundation, visit jeffrisfoundation.org.