

BMTS Article Digest December 2010 – January 2011

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

The following is a compilation of articles that may be of interest to BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee members. This and past digests can also be accessed in the Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee page of www.bmtsonline.com.

Scott

Take a look at the National Center for Bicycling & Walking's newsletter, **CenterLines**. You can also arrange to have it emailed directly to you.

See <http://www.bikewalk.org/newsletterarchives.php>

CenterLines is the bi-weekly electronic news bulletin of the National Center for Bicycling & Walking. **CenterLines** is our way of quickly delivering news and information you can use to create more walkable and bicycle-friendly communities.

Girls who walk, bike to school do better in tests

Wed, Dec 8 2010

By Alison McCook

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Girls, but not boys, who walk or bike to school instead of getting a ride perform better in tests of verbal and math skills, according to a new study of teens living in Spanish cities.

And the longer the commute, the higher the test scores, regardless of how much exercise girls got outside of school.

Still, it's unclear whether the commute itself matters, or if exercise in general or some other factor is at play, said Dr. Francois Trudeau of the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, who was not involved in the study.

"Would basketball in the morning do as much as an active commute?" he wondered.

Current guidelines suggest that children and teenagers get at least an hour of moderate or vigorous exercise every day -- equivalent to a brisk walk or jog, respectively. But less than half of U.S. children, and even fewer teenagers, manage to work this much exercise into their routines.

The teen brain undergoes important changes in structure and function, and many researchers believe physical activity may have a positive effect. It increases blood flow to the brain, for instance, and appears to improve concentration, memory, and other key factors associated with learning.

Earlier this year, a large study of urban teens in Spain suggested those who exercise more outside of school do better on cognitive tests.

To test whether the same might be true for an active commute to school, David Martínez-Gómez of the Spanish National Research Council in Madrid and his colleagues looked at test scores from 1,700 urban Spanish teens, and asked them how they got to school.

Roughly 65 percent of teens said they either rode a bike or walked to school.

The authors found that girls with an active commute scored an average of 53 points in tests of cognitive function, while those who got a ride scored nearly four points less.

And girls whose active commute lasted longer than 15 minutes did better on the tests than girls who walked or biked for less than 15 minutes on their way to school -- a sign the relationship between active commutes and test performance is real, Trudeau said.

Indeed, the effect persisted even after the researchers accounted for age, body weight, social and economic status, and activities outside school.

It's not clear why there was no link between active commutes and cognitive performance among boys. Another study among Swedish teens found the same thing, the Spanish researchers write in the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, and it's possible that if boys are more active than girls overall, a bit of extra exercise during their commute wouldn't make much of a difference.

Alternatively, brain differences between girls and boys might cause them to respond differently to exercise, the authors suggest.

Trudeau added that walking or biking to school often takes longer than a car or bus ride, which may provide time to reflect and mentally prepare for the day, giving them an edge. "It may be a good period to start thinking about the school day."

He cautioned, however, that not all commutes are equal -- a walk through European cities, with their cafes and shops, can be much more stimulating than a walk through a typical North American suburb, which could impact the benefits teens get from it. Plus, not every commute is safe, if kids have to navigate dangerous neighborhoods or busy roads.

"Walking in the streets of Spain may be different than walking in the suburbs of Montreal or Los Angeles," Trudeau noted.

SOURCE: link.reuters.com/cur29q Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, online December 6, 2010.

The Greyhound runs again

Bus station offers first impressions on arriving in Binghamton

BY ROGER LUTHER • DECEMBER 12, 2010, 12:00 AM



The Binghamton bus terminal

"Millicent Barnes, age 25, young woman waiting for a bus on a rainy November night ..."

So begins Rod Serling's introduction to the 1960 "Twilight Zone" episode titled "Mirror Image." Set in a lonely bus station at night, it is said that Serling wrote the story about the bus terminal he remembered from his hometown of Binghamton.

Serling was not alone with his fond memories of the Chenango Street bus station. For more than 70 years, travelers to the Binghamton area have been impressed by its unique character.

Streamline Moderne is the technical term describing the building's architectural style, a form of Art Deco design evident in many Greyhound bus terminals built between 1937 and the mid-1940s.

Intended to depict aerodynamics and a sense of speed, the design is attributed to Louisville architect William S. Arrasmith, who designed more than 60 Moderne Greyhound terminals in his career, of which only a half-dozen still exist today.

In his book "The Streamline Era of Greyhound Terminals: The Architecture of W.S. Arrasmith," author Frank Wrennick wrote of the Binghamton terminal: "The façade featured cast stone details, including scalloped cornice window reveals, the block-lettered word

'Greyhound' and a running greyhound. Glass block was employed over the main street entrance and in a wing wall, which concealed the bus docks from the street." Without a doubt, it is the running neon greyhound high above the entrance that is remembered by most.

Constructed in 1938, the Binghamton terminal has been in continuous operation since that time. In 1986, a Metropolitan Transportation feasibility report recommended Broome County establish a transportation center in the City of Binghamton to accommodate major bus lines as well as the county transit system, and also to include a waiting area for local taxi cabs.

According to Gail Domin, chief planner of the Broome County Department of Planning and Economic Development, buyouts of adjacent property began two decades after the feasibility report, and construction of the Greater Binghamton Transportation Center started in 2009. Throughout the construction, great care was taken to preserve and reuse the original Streamline Moderne façade of the 1938 structure.

"The county executive and planning department were adamant that the (original features) be saved and incorporated into the new design," Domin said. "The classic details of this structure are still clearly visible in its streamline design with vertical neon sign, relief moldings, glass block and rounded corners."

Today, high above Chenango Street, the greyhound runs again.

As George H. Bagnetto, Broome County public transportation facility commissioner, said at the opening of the new terminal on Nov. 9: "It gives a good first impression to people who come to our city."

Next to a park bench at the southeast corner of the terminal, something else gives visitors a good first impression of our community.

It was in March 2005, while researching a New York state hospital, that I met Harvey, a longtime former employee of the facility. His health failing, Harvey relayed many fond memories in the months before his death. One of the most intriguing was of a patient he attended to in the early 1950s who went on to write a book about his stay at the hospital.

An Internet search produced the man's name and, surprisingly, a copy of his long out-of-print book. The patient was William Moore, born in Binghamton in 1927. While in his 20s, the death of Moore's close friend, teacher and mentor had a profound influence on him and resulted in Moore's brief hospitalization.

Following his release, Moore wrote prophetically about his destiny, concluding to his readers: "I go forward in hope ... my whole future is in your hands, at your mercy. I can only give my life, and you must make it or break it for me."

In the years that followed, Moore spoke out peacefully against racial segregation and social injustice. In 1963, one year before the murder of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, and five years before the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Moore embarked on a lone civil rights walk through Alabama and Mississippi.

While walking a remote stretch of road in Alabama, Moore was murdered — shot twice in the head at close range with a .22 caliber rifle. The murder weapon was reportedly traced to an Alabama Ku Klux Klan member who was never indicted for the crime.

On the 47th anniversary of his murder — April 23, 2010 — a memorial plaque in tribute to Moore was unveiled. The plaque, which concludes with the statement "Walk on Bill Moore, walk on," is now permanently displayed at the Greater Binghamton Transportation Center.

The character of a community is well- defined by the beauty of its structures, the humanitarian achievements of its people, and the respect for and preservation of its history. Today, there is a bus station in Binghamton that embodies all three of these attributes — a place not only of sight and sound, but of mind — where once again the greyhound runs, Bill Moore walks and visitors get their first impressions of a remarkable community.

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Binghamton's Regency Hotel gets a new owner

Weissman group purchases troubled downtown facility from city

BY GEORGE BASLER • GBASLER@GANNETT.COM • DECEMBER 15, 2010, 10:30 PM



The city finalized the sale Wednesday of the former Regency in downtown Binghamton. A private owner purchased the facility and renamed it the **Binghamton Riverwalk Hotel & Conference Center**. (WILLIAM MOYER / Staff Photo)

BINGHAMTON -- A Westchester County real estate developer is the new owner of the Regency Hotel and Conference Center, a move city officials hope will reinvigorate the troubled downtown business.

The city announced the sale of the hotel to Binghamton Hospitality & Conference Center Inc. for \$3.625 million. The new ownership team is headed by Alfred Weissman, whose real estate firm Alfred Weissman Real Estate Inc., also owns 20 Hawley Street, a distinctive black-steel-glass structure located next to the Broome County Veterans Memorial Arena that the firm is developing as student housing.

The deal for the hotel was announced Wednesday at a news conference, about an hour after the city and the Weissman firm closed on the purchase agreement.

The 205-room hotel will have a new name -- **Binghamton Riverwalk Hotel and Conference Center** -- and undergo an extensive renovation, said Weissman, company president.

While the hotel has been neglected for years, his firm "saw it as an opportunity," Weissman said.

"We're going to make this a great place," he said.

Under the agreement, the Weissman firm will make an initial payment of \$1 million to the city. The firm will then make structured payments through 2014, Mayor Matthew T. Ryan said.

The city filed a deed in April to resume ownership of the hotel after the former owner, NJDV Hospitality, embroiled in bankruptcy proceedings, did not make a final payment to the city.

"This (Wednesday's announcement) is a big deal. We didn't want to be in the hotel business," Ryan said.

The sale price is about \$3 million less than the \$6.5 million NJDV Hospitality was set to pay on the hotel before filing for bankruptcy in October 2009.

The price reflects the reality that the hotel market has deteriorated over the past several years, Ryan said.

Binghamton had "several offers" but chose Weissman because of the firm's good track record in redeveloping other properties, and its plan to spend money to renovate the old Regency into "a first-class hotel," Ryan said.

A selling point for Weissman was the progress the firm is making in renovating 20 Hawley Street, which is expected to open in August, the mayor said.

"I'm very excited about it. I think we have found a first-class developer and owner of the hotel," City Council President Martin J. Gerchman, D-2nd District, said.

Nonetheless, the sale price does not cover a \$4.6 million loan the city owes the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development from a previous loan on the hotel.

"The saga isn't over yet," Ryan said, adding the city will work with HUD to renegotiate for a longer repayment time.

Weissman Real Estate, located in Rye, specializes in developing buildings that have had problems, Weissman said. The company's projects include the redevelopment of a former Saks Fifth Avenue department store in Garden City on Long Island. The firm also leased a long-vacant building in Greenburgh to Dannon Co. Inc., the yogurt company.

Weissman would not discuss how much the firm plans to spend for upgrades, but emphasized he believes his firm can be successful because it is willing to renovate and improve the building.

Newport Hospitality Group of Williamsburg, Va., will continue to be involved in its management.

Even before the closing, Weissman Real Estate has been doing renovation work at the hotel, with the understanding the firm would be financially responsible for this work if the sale failed to materialize, city officials said.

The firm has almost finished renovating the main ballroom and is constructing a garden patio area. The parking area is also getting a facelift.

Future work will include remodeling all the guest rooms, renovating the gym and upgrading the restaurant, Weissman and his son, Alan Weissman, said.

Ryan estimated it will take millions of dollars to do the renovation.

"The bones of the hotel are great, but it's been neglected for 10 years. It needs modernizing," Alfred Weissman said.

Tilly Carbo, who will stay on as general manager, was optimistic about the new owner.

"They're doing amazing things to bring a new look to the hotel. It's a new era," she said.

The purchase agreement was signed Wednesday. The city kept a deed in lieu of foreclosure, allowing it to regain ownership and keep the initial payment if the Weissman firm fails to make good on the rest of the sale price.

The city took control of the hotel after the previous owner, Sarbro Associates, defaulted on a city-backed federal loan in 2005. The city was set to sell the hotel to Nexus Hospitality Management, of Scranton, Pa., in 2008, but financing fell through.

NJDV Hospitality took control of the hotel in February 2009, paying \$2.5 million up front to the city.

"This is our third deal. I really believe this will work," Gerchman said.

 msnbc.com



BusinessWire



By **Allison Linn** Senior writer

Ikea gives employees bikes (assembly required)

Retailers says bikes are meant as a thanks and to encourage healthy habits

This holiday season, some employees will get a bonus, others will get a restaurant gift card and a few may even get a nice bottle of liquor.

Ikea's U.S. employees will get to assemble themselves a brand new bike.

The Swedish retailer, best known for its inexpensive, assembly-required furniture, recently announced that it was giving all its U.S. employees an all-terrain bicycle.

Befitting Ikea, spokeswoman Mona Liss said the bikes arrived last week in a flat box and needed to be assembled.

The 12,400 bicycles, which were custom-made for Ikea, are meant to show appreciation for employees' hard work – and offer an incentive for them to bike to work.

"This is our way of saying 'thanks Ikea co-workers for being strongly committed to working together,'" Mike Ward, Ikea U.S. president, said in a release announcing the giveaway. "We hope this bike will be taken in the spirit of the season while supporting a healthy lifestyle and everyday sustainable transport."

Liss said the company has done bike giveaways in other countries before, including one a few years ago at Ikea's U.K. operations.

The retailer also encourages people to be healthy in other ways, she said. At the company's headquarters in Pennsylvania, for example, yoga is offered twice a week.

"It's part of the culture here to live a healthy lifestyle," she said.

In the U.S., she said, the company does a holiday gift most years. Last year, it was a \$50 restaurant gift card and another year it was a coffee table book about home.

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Broome names new STOP-DWI chief

Legislative assistant Marion replaces May

BY GEORGE BASLER • GBASLER@GANNETT.COM • JANUARY 3, 2011, 10:20 PM

Christopher Marion, who lost his Broome County job when the legislature changed from Democratic to Republican control, has a new county position.

Marion, who had been the legislature's legislative assistant for four years, is taking over as Broome's STOP-DWI coordinator, County Executive Barbara J. Fiala announced Monday. Marion succeeds Jim May, who retired near the end of 2010.

"I'm really excited. I want to build off what Jim May has created here in the last 27 years," said Marion, who began his new job Monday.

The STOP-DWI position pays about \$49,000 a year, he said. In the position, Marion will coordinate the county's efforts to reduce alcohol and other drug-related traffic crashes through a comprehensive alcohol and highway safety program.

Key parts of the STOP-DWI program, which is financed entirely by fines collected by state government, include a public awareness and education program, media campaigns, coordination of efforts of local agencies, training sessions, work with middle and high school SADD chapters and providing specialized equipment to police agencies.

Two main events are the sponsorship of the annual STOP-DWI Holiday Classic that brings high school basketball teams from across the country to Broome County for a basketball tournament the last week in December, as well as the Chris Thater Memorial Races that bring throngs of runners and cyclists to Binghamton's West Side the last weekend in August.

May could not be reached for comment Monday.

A release from Fiala's office said Marion has worked with all departments of Broome County government, as well as with state and federal representatives, on a variety of issues as the legislature's legislative assistant.

"Additionally, Chris has experience working on special projects. He was instrumental in the research into and then the implementation of the Pro Act Prescription Discount Card and Broome County's consolidated taxi regulations," the release said.

Marion spent 2008 deployed to Afghanistan as a platoon leader in an infantry company. He currently serves as a first lieutenant in the New York Army National Guard.

Marion was replaced as legislative assistant by Jim Baumgartner, who ran for the legislative seat carried by Democratic opponent Jason Garnar.

