

LAWRENCE HARMON

# No Starbucks, but local roots lose out, too

THE COMPETITION for commercial space in the historic Ferdinand Building in Roxbury's Dudley Square has been billed as a battle of the chains vs. small businesses with neighborhood roots. But it turns out they were both losers in the initial round of recommendations made in March by a seven-member selection committee to the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

Starbucks, Burger King, Dunkin' Donuts, and Subway didn't make the cut to lease space on the ground floor of the future headquarters of the Boston School Department. Local favorites, including the venerated Haley House cafe, nonprofit Discover Roxbury, and restaurateur Darryl Settles also came up short. Instead, the selection committee, comprised mostly of city officials, chose the following six proposals from among 22 submissions: Tasty Burger, Clover Fast Food, Final Touch With Class apparel shop, Gallery Eye Care, Wilcox Hospitality Group/Parish Cafe, and ShantiBoston prepared foods. The list, however, remains somewhat fluid.

It's great that so many private companies want a presence in the city-owned Ferdinand Building, once home to the region's largest furniture business. The building has been empty for more than 30 years while political leaders engaged in idle chatter about resurrecting Dudley Square and the surrounding low-income neighborhood. Three years ago, former Mayor Thomas Menino announced and implemented a plan to move 500 School Department employees from their downtown headquarters to Dudley Square by 2015. Newly elected Mayor Martin Walsh has jumped aboard. And just as Menino and Walsh had hoped, private developers are now expressing interest in other city-owned parcels — including a portion of the 2100 block of Washington Street — in this formerly desolate section of Roxbury.

With so much new construction underway, the neighborhood looks like it is on the verge of turning the corner economically. It's still somewhat sketchy. But walking around has a similar feel to the South End during the late 1970s, when that neighborhood began its transition from a run-down part of town to a desirable address. There are real concerns, however. For every Roxbury resident who longs to see the construction of upmarket shops and market-rate housing in Dudley Square, there are probably two who worry that low-income families will be pushed out by gentrification.

Architects and construction engineers associated with Shawmut Design and Construction figured out how to restore the Ferdinand Building on an irregular, triangular block. City planners, at least, should be able to find the right mix of tenants for 18,000 square feet of commercial space. They should see it as a microcosm of Boston's challenge to create safe and attractive neighborhoods without driving out families of modest means.

Finding space for Haley House would be a good start. The nonprofit group that started out in 1966 as a soup kitchen in the South End has not only stayed true to its original social vision but expanded into Dudley Square with a terrific bakery and cafe. The food, conversation, and hospitality are consistently good. People who are down on their luck feel as much at home in the cafe as the neighborhood's movers and shakers. It would make so much sense for the group to extend its reach by bringing organic pizza and homemade ice cream into a commercial space at the Ferdinand Building. Hundreds have signed a petition in favor of Haley House's application. And by midweek, it appeared that the selection committee might actually reconsider a bad decision.

A loyal streak runs through residents of Roxbury. There are not many places in the city where a Foot Locker can set up shop next door to a mom-and-pop sneaker store and it's the Foot Locker that goes out of business. But it happened a few years ago in Dudley Square.

"There are organizations and businesses that have been here and represent what the future could and should look like," said Roxbury activist Kim Janey, who co-chairs Discover Roxbury. The homegrown arts organization was also unsuccessful in its bid for space in the Ferdinand Building.

Ferdinand's planners want to see the lunch places on the ground floor turn into dinner places with table service in the evening. State lawmakers could help by lifting the cap on liquor licenses, which are few and far between in Roxbury. But why stop there? After dinner, restaurant space at the Ferdinand could be transformed into a nightclub and lounge. Such entertainment venues are also rare in Roxbury. The concept works well at Dbar on Dorchester Avenue, another comeback neighborhood.

Prosperous neighborhoods don't need to be posh. But they need the right mix. The Ferdinand block in Roxbury is now in position to show how it's done.

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JOANNA WEISS

# What's worse: Shame or obscurity?

OF COURSE, she's not going away. That's what so many people have wished for Monica Lewinsky this week — out of a mix of sympathy, distaste, or both — now that she's thrown herself back into our consciousness with an essay in Vanity Fair.

Why now? Conspiracy theories abound. But the stated reason is that Lewinsky needs a job, and sees a cause: to be the poster child for the perils of online fame. She compares her '90s shaming in the Drudge Report to the torment kids endure today on Facebook. She calls herself "possibly the first person whose global humiliation was driven by the Internet."

But she's wrong. She wasn't the first victim of the Internet age. She was the first reality star.

That concept didn't exist when Monica met Bill in the corridors outside the Oval Office. There was no "Survivor," no "Real Housewives" or "Dance Moms" or "Jersey Shore," no camera crews trailing various Kardashians, helping them spin long careers out of sex tapes and marital squabbles.

Back then, there was a nascent Internet dirt machine — not to mention a powerful political machine — that gladly chewed Lewinsky up alive. Her recounting of those days has attracted sympathy, much of it deserved. She writes that

her relationship with Clinton was consensual, that the damage came in the aftermath. She was a neophyte to Washington and adulthood, manipulated by people far more savvy about both.

But Lewinsky is 40 now, too old

doesn't pan out — a spinoff show, a second career in fashion, a line of jewelry to sell on QVC — you still get validation. You're on TV and on the covers of magazines. You're somebody.

And not everyone can cope



Monica Lewinsky wasn't the first victim of the Internet age. She was the first reality star.

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to claim that she's still being bullied by the grown-ups. At a certain point, she made a conscious decision to let a scandal define her.

This is what reality stars do. Today, we're beyond the point of "they edited me to look bad." Today, the lines are blurred between infamy, fame, and opportunity. People enter TV contracts understanding precisely what's expected of them when the cameras roll: a willingness to overturn a table in faux-anger, to "privately" gripe about people who will eventually hear you say everything, to pick a scab from your distant or recent past and talk about it, again and again.

The tradeoffs are clear: money, yes, and something more intoxicating. Even if the implicit dream

when the attention goes away. Bill Clinton survived, the Bush era began, and Lewinsky took conscious steps to stay in public view. She talked to Barbara Walters, went to Vanity Fair parties, launched a handbag line, traveled in New York's social scene. She hosted a dating reality show on Fox. She shilled for Jenny Craig. She answered questions, before a live audience, for an HBO documentary.

She flirted with obscurity for a few years, decamping to London to get a degree. In 2009, through a spokeswoman, she declined an interview with Time. (This is how you project your importance: Have a spokesperson to declare that you don't want publicity.) Then, she writes, she started looking for jobs

that would require her to have a public presence.

You could imagine an alternate universe, in which she moved to Wisconsin or Texas or anywhere outside of Manhattan, maybe changed her name or maybe not, found something interesting and meaningful to do, stopped talking about the past. Maybe she'd be a minor curiosity in town, another local with an interesting back story. Maybe in 40 years, some reporter would discover her again, cajole her into talking, draw out some self-reflection. Surely, the sympathy would come.

But Lewinsky didn't want to wait that long. Instead, she got what she asked for: a gorgeous photo spread in a glossy magazine, a smattering of new praise, a rehashing of the old condescension. And relevance — that's the biggest thing. We're all repeating her name again. Yes, I'm doing it, too.

So this will be her legacy, and reality junkies know why. To fall in foolish love, at 23, and become a national joke? That's bad.

But to become a historical footnote, forgiven and mostly forgotten? Apparently, that's worse. Expect her on "Celebrity Apprentice" before long.

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CARLO ROTELLA

# Burlesque à la Boston

Even bawdy shows bear the mark of academia

I RECENTLY spent a day in Cambridge that began at an academic conference on cities at Harvard's Radcliffe Institute and ended well into the night at a burlesque show called "Strip Zeppelin" held at Oberon, the second stage of the American Repertory Theater, which is also part of Harvard. Under the university's august auspices, I encountered two communities of experts with advanced training: those who think about cities for a living and those who assembled a theatrical extravaganza around the undeniable truth that the titanic crunching blues-derived grooves of "Immigrant Song" and "The Ocean" provide excellent accompaniment for dancing mostly unclothed. Together, the two groups taught a lesson about the role that institutions like universities can play in giving shape to all sorts of creative inspirations.

You can probably picture the conference; "Strip Zeppelin" requires a little more description. The show's main force was Niki Luparelli, a robust blonde wiseacre sauced into a bustier, drink perpetually in hand. She did a fine job with Robert Plant's caterwauling vocals, and supplied louche patter between songs. She had recruited a band, all women except for the keyboard player, that rose gamely to the challenge of Zep's signature pomp and grind. Local burlesque performers in a wide variety of female shapes and sizes came on in relays to sashay, wriggle, and dangle circus-style from rings or ropes. It was all very ironic and yet curiously earnest.

It may come as news to you, as it did to me, that Boston has a burlesque scene. It does, a growing one — and, in keeping with local habits, Boston's burlesque folk are eager to distinguish what they do from what goes on in New York City. "New York's more into vintage," explains a stalwart of the local scene who performs under the stage name Mary Widow, "but in Boston there's a lot of alt- and neo-burlesque, contemporary performance art and dance theater with a burlesque element."

And, naturally, in an overeducated city like this one, the whole enterprise needs to be adequately theorized. "There's a lot of

talk about whether we're 'chasing the male gaze,'" says Vanessa "Sugar Dish" White, artistic director of the Lipstick Criminals troupe and of "The Slutcracker," an adult take on Tchaikovsky that does big business at the Somerville Theatre every December. "You'll hear people asking, 'Is it a feminist thing or not? Is it body-positive?'"

As that kind of seminar language suggests, even burlesque bears the marks of school in this academic company town. Between the hypercompetent Berklee-trained musicians in the band and the dancers who showed signs of backgrounds in ballet and other traditional forms, "Strip Zeppelin" offered a reminder that in Boston you're never far from the classroom. Niki Luparelli, who has had plenty of classical voice training, says, "I could have taken that degree and gone into teaching music, which would have been satisfying in its own way, but I would have been censoring myself all the time. I'm a bawdy person."

Oberon offers a club-theater setting especially suited to experimental, informal, and fringe-dwelling productions. One of its missions is to provide a first-class venue at which local performers can put on ambitious shows, and the imprimatur of the American Repertory Theater helps them build their audiences and resumes. Burlesque is part of the mix at Oberon, right alongside Euripides' "The Bacchae," a recent production of which was directed by Widow.

As an institution, a university serves as a vessel for creative inspiration. A school's endowment, prestige, accumulated expertise, and campus facilities combine to form a container into which all manner of creative people can pour all sorts of inchoate impulses — everything from the urge to understand cities to the urge to get naked and move to music. An institution can help such impulses take shape and substance in the world. Between the conference on cities, at which I learned a lot, and the burlesque show, at which I had a somewhat bemused good time, I treated myself to a long, edifying day at school.

Carlo Rotella is director of American studies at Boston College. His latest book is "Playing in Time: Essays, Profiles, and Other True Stories."

Niki Luparelli is the main force behind "Strip Zeppelin" in Cambridge.



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