

Cincinnati Museum Center

Todd Portune

1 The building itself is awe inspiring. It's over powering.
2 The rotunda, the mosaics, the whole visual, architectural
3 experience of the facility is unbelievable. It's one of the
4 great public facilities - oh, forget "public." It's one of
5 the great structures in the world. It's a magical building.
6 What it's meant to so many people. What it means to this
7 community. It has a real physical and emotional impact on
8 you just by virtue of what this structure is and how it
9 looks and how you experience it as an individual. My first
10 recollection of Union Terminal as a kid - I remember my dad
11 bringing me down here and - I must have been, I don't know,
12 probably eight years old, maybe seven - and I was just in
13 so much awe of this huge place but really the dreams that
14 it inspired in me as a kid about all the places that you
15 could go to and riding a passenger train and going off to
16 the places that you'd never seen before was - it was very,
17 very exciting. I always wanted to ride a train, but we
18 never, never did - never did, never did. In 1972 - I was 14
19 years old - and Dad had just been named the director of
20 what was called the "Law in America Society." It was a new
21 national public interest center dealing with police-
22 juvenile relations. And so he was in Chicago for a month.
23 So my older brother and I each split two weeks in Chicago

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1 with Dad while he was doing all this stuff. And we both
2 went to Chicago and back by riding a train and taking it
3 out of Union Terminal and finally I had this experience and
4 I was a passenger, getting on a train and when we returned
5 - coming back into Cincinnati going along the tracks there
6 along the Ohio River and then on into Union Terminal and
7 coming out of the Rotunda and the skyline of the city in
8 the distance at night - it - the whole trip was magical.
9 And it was not only a great father-son experience that I
10 had with my dad, it was great in terms of really closing
11 the deal on all these dreams I had about Union Terminal and
12 train travel and that sort of thing. It really was a
13 magical experience and then just - just two months after
14 that, my dad died. And so, for that reason I - as well I
15 think that whole trip took on real larger-than-life
16 impression on me and it was truly one of the great
17 experiences that I've had in my life and Union Terminal was
18 at the center of it. My daughter, Emily, is - as we speak -
19 ten years old and Emma has lived a life of some challenge.
20 She has Down syndrome and she is the embodiment of love and
21 joy and happiness. And it's a real joy in my life. And she
22 has grown up coming to Museum Center, taking part in
23 particular in the Children's Museum that she loves to go to

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1 and all aspects of it from the water play and learning area
2 to the playground area where you climb through trees and up
3 into netting and tunnels and all sorts of things. She
4 absolutely loves that and she talks about Museum Center.
5 And at one point, I forget exactly what it was that I had
6 that I showed to Emma but she immediately recognized the
7 image of Museum Center and that's what she said. She said,
8 "Museum!" And we'll be driving to downtown and she'll have
9 her face glued to the window as we drive by where Union
10 Terminal is she's looking at that. She loves coming here.
11 It plays a real big role in Emma's life and in my life with
12 Emma. There were times when the building itself was looking
13 for the right fit and the right role to play in our
14 community. And people that cared a lot about the
15 architecture, the structure, were doing everything they
16 could in order to keep the building going until that "right
17 fit" was found. And so, "Was this the best place for a
18 shopping mall?" Clearly not. It certainly wasn't the right
19 fit for it long term. What it does today is. But why that
20 was important was because the people of Cincinnati,
21 Hamilton County, the greater Cincinnati region, know and
22 knew then and have always known I think how important it is
23 to keep this building going. And that to me is very

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1 encouraging from the standpoint of when we look to the
2 future of what still can happen because I know that there
3 is real passion in our community for this building and for
4 what it represents and the asset that it is and what it
5 will do for greater Cincinnati. So much so that people
6 willing to allow it to be operated in a certain fashion
7 only because they knew that sometimes you've gotta build a
8 bridge to get from where you were to where you truly need
9 to be.