
Bob Cassilly City Museum

By M. Karen Hubbard

Bob Cassilly graduated from Fontbonne University with a degree in Art. In the mid '70's, he renovated a house in Lafayette Square. This area was very run down at the time and people thought the houses should be torn down, but Cassilly saw the homes differently. In 1983, he founded an architectural carving and casting company. The company specialized in large sized art like the turtle sculptures in Turtle Park (across Highway 40/64 from the St. Louis Zoo), the "Mysterious Monarch" and the "Lopatapillar" at the entrance to the Butterfly House in Chesterfield, Missouri.

In 1993, he bought a 750,000 square foot complex in downtown St. Louis for \$.69 per square foot including the old International Shoe building. From there, Bob's talents led him to create one of the most unique attractions in Saint Louis – The City Museum. The City Museum is a playground, funhouse, and many other things all in one.

Bob used anything he could get his hands on to build his fabulous creation. Everything he used came from within the City of Saint Louis. A few examples are a stage from an old Catholic center, the front of the Saint Louis Title Company (as the ticket area), and an old generator from the largest windmill in the world. When Bob discovered that concrete trucks in Saint Louis usually dumped whatever they had left at the end of the day, he asked them to start dumping it at the museum. He then used that concrete to build all sorts of things including the caves that people can journey through inside the museum. Bob's cleverness in recycling helped to craft a unique playground.

The City Museum opened in 1997 as a non-profit company. The museum sought funds from the Danforth Foundation and other groups. The Danforth Foundation gave \$250,000 in 2000. In 2002, the museum ran into financial difficulties and was threatened to be closed. Cassilly was prevented from purchasing it so he persuaded others to do so, and the museum went from a non-profit company to a profit making company. This meant that the museum would pay its bills with the money it would take in from ticket sales, gift shop sales, and museum rentals.

Since its opening, the museum has been extremely popular. Yet, Bob and his artistic crew were not finished. They are constantly adding new features to the museum. Some of the fantastic sites within the museum include Art City (which features artists, potters, glass blowers and sculptors), the Everyday Circus, World Aquarium, and MostroCity – an amazing outdoor playground which includes two aircraft fuselage and a fire engine. In 2006, there were more than 600,000 visitors to the City Museum. There are even lofts at the City Museum for people to live in. The City Museum's slogan is, "Explore the Unexpected."

Cassilly has started another venture in St. Louis called Cementland. It is located on Riverview Drive, two miles south of the Chain of Rocks Bridge. In 2000, Cassilly bought 53 acres of land including 1400 feet of riverfront property for a

little under \$2 million. The land to the east of Riverview Drive has the closed Lafarge Cement Factory on it which Cassilly hopes to convert to Cementland (a giant art installation). He has built a one-hundred-foot hill from 182,000 truckloads of dirt. (He gets paid to let companies unload their debris on this site.) Cassilly's goal for this site is similar to the goal for City Museum: to create an unmistakable place "where people can come and do things they are not supposed to do."

On the riverfront property, he would like to create the "Great Rivers Resource Center." Plans for Cementland include an observation deck and a restaurant. He hopes to have this project opened in 2010.

Bob Cassilly does not like to define himself. He is a sculptor, artist, businessman, boss, landlord, real-estate mogul, museum director, and a wheeler dealer. His mission is to "awaken the childlike imagination, joy, and sense of wonder in all ages and transform the way people look at the world."