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New life for a picture-perfect

BARN



Photos by GLEN STUBBE • gstubbe@startribune.com

Life-sized plastic cows keep watch over the old farm on Pioneer Trail (pictured at top in a previous incarnation).

The 1942 arch-roof barn on Pioneer Trail in Eden Prairie has new paint, a new roof and new lawn ornaments.

By LAURIE BLAKE
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The cows have come home to the historic arch-roof dairy barn on Pioneer Trail in Eden Prairie.

Steve Schussler, the flamboyant entrepreneur who rescued the barn from obliteration during road construction a year ago, has placed six colorful — and comical — life-sized plastic cows in the yard outside the 1940s era barn.

One is a New York cow — emblazoned with a picture of the Statue of Liberty. Another wears a Yankees baseball uniform. A third sports sneakers and a basketball. Two others are a black-and-white mother with calf.

The fanciful creatures make an unusual accent for a stolid, staid his-



Steve Schussler is hanging crystal chandeliers in the barn's soaring interior.

toric property. But Schussler considers the barn an art object and wants to showcase it for attention. As people drive by and see the lawn art, "maybe I can put a smile" on their faces, he said. "The cows make people smile."

The barn, at 14150 Pioneer Trail, is all that is left of an old farmstead that was in the path of Hennepin County's widening of Pioneer Trail. It's considered a picture-perfect example of a "Wisconsin-type" barn, stand-

ing now on its own small island of land as an icon of a bygone era when a farmer could make a living with 25 to 30 milk cows.

Barn continues on AA5 ►

New life for a picture-perfect BARN

◀ BARN FROM AA1

Schussler has had the barn painstakingly repainted and re-roofed and outlined with agricultural-style white fencing since buying it from the county for \$82,000 in 2010.

Asked how much he has sunk into the barn, he said he spent more than he paid for it on the roof alone.

Still to come is exterior lighting and new grass, which Schussler plans to maintain to golf-course perfection.

Inside the barn, in the second floor's arched, cathedral-like hay mow, he is hanging 40 crystal chandeliers. And down from the 60-foot high ceiling he has mounted two massive fans that keep the building cool.

On the ground floor, where dairy cows once were stabled and milked, Schussler stores vintage cars and jukeboxes. Art and collectible toys are displayed on the walls. And at every entrance to the barn there is a planter filled with flowers.

Refurbishing of a main floor bathroom also is underway, as is the installation of heat and air conditioning.

"I could not be more thrilled," said City Council Member Ron Case, who toured the building last week. "I feel like he is saving this for the people of Eden Prairie. This building would not have been here but for Steve."

Case said he would support just about any improvement Schussler may want to make to the building because "what he is doing is a Cadillac class act."

Schussler learned of the plight of the barn in a newspaper account and was the only person to



Photos by GLEN STUBBE • gstubbe@startribune.com

Workers positioned a statue draped in a flag and carrying a basketball. "The cows make people smile," Schussler said.

bid for it in a county bidding competition.

He said he saved it out of a love for "preserving something old." Now he is using it as a creative laboratory. "It inspires me."

His firm, Schussler Creative Inc., dreams up theatrical environments, collects artifacts for them and sells them as the signature theme settings for restaurants, retail stores and attractions. Among his creations: The Rainforest Cafe at the Mall of America and the Galaxy Drive In in St. Louis Park.

The barn gives him more space for his collections and creations.

But Schussler will not have carte blanche at the historic site. As a building that is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the barn is protected by a property preservation easement held

by the State Historic Preservation Office, said John Gertz, a historic preservation consultant to the city of Eden Prairie.

That means that the Preservation Office must review and sign off on all of Schussler's plans.

Some of Schussler's improvements — the new roof, capping the silo and putting in better windows — have helped preserve the building, Gertz said.

As a general rule the characteristics of the building that make it historically significant should not be diminished in its re-use, Gertz said. "The less you do the better with regard to historic properties. You don't take historic properties and turn them into almost a theme park venue."

While Schussler is adding his own touches in the form of lawn art and crystal chandeliers, "I don't think anything he has done so far is non-reversible. It's through that

lens that you evaluate what he is doing," Gertz said.

Gertz will advise the Eden Prairie Heritage Preservation Commission to recommend the barn for designation by the City Council as a local heritage preservation site. With that designation, local preservation zoning would add another measure of protection to the barn, Gertz said.

The barn lacks space for the parking that would be needed to turn it into a public attraction. But Case said he sees room to park about 30 cars and hopes that the barn can be used for occasional public functions.

Schussler said the barn's second floor hay mow, which faces the Flying Cloud Airport, might be a perfect place to sip wine and look out the window at landing and departing planes.