
Journeyman Breaks Ground in Valparaiso

On Dec. 3, Journeyman Distillery officially broke ground on a historic restoration project in Valparaiso, transforming the formerly abandoned Anco windshield wiper factory into a 140,000-square foot destination which includes plans for a distillery, brewery, whiskey garden, American fare restaurant and steakhouse, cigar room, karaoke, and event spaces where memories will be made.

The site, located on the 300 block of South Campbell, dates to one of the first woolen mills in Porter County, established just after the Civil War. Through the years, the location was home to a wagon and carriage company, soap company, Fontaine Brothers Pin Factory, and, most recently as the Anco windshield wiper factory. Since the mid 1980s, the property has been virtually vacant.

“Journeyman Distillery in Valparaiso is an exciting next step for the Welter family,” said Journeyman Owner and Operator Bill Welter. Having first arrived in Valparaiso in the early 1900’s, the Welter family has had continuous business operations in the community since the early 1970’s. Bill Welter follows in the footsteps of Father Chuck Welter and Grandfather Bill Welter as he embarks on the latest adventure in Valparaiso.

“As a city, we recognized the potential of this property with its proximity to our historic downtown,” said Mayor Matt Murphy who was a member of the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission in 2017 when the commission acquired the brownfield property that included the factory. A year later, Bill Welter presented his vision of elevating the property by transforming it into a Journeyman Distillery, similar in nature to the project in Three Oaks Michigan where Journeyman transformed the former Featherbone Corset Factory into a true destination including distillery, restaurant, and event space.

“The Valparaiso Journeyman Distillery will elevate this property to a true destination and provide further development opportunities for this excellent location adjacent to our downtown, including hundreds of jobs,” said Murphy. “Further, part of this exciting development will house the City’s Transit Center and the shared parking lot will also serve passengers of our Dash commuter bus service. We’re very excited to see this project take shape and thank all of the organizations and people who have come together to make it possible,” he said. Those organizations include the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission, Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA), Northern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), and the Indiana Economic Development Commission (IEDC).

Bill Welter spoke of tremendous gratitude and appreciation to the leadership in the community stating that “leap and the net will appear” indicating that the net in Valparaiso is strong and wide with the support of his Journeyman team, the community, and leadership from the city itself. Welter went on to thank Rob Thorgren and Patrick Lyp of the Redevelopment Commission, the IEDC, RDA, NPS, family and friends for the support given to the project. Much gratitude was expressed to the loyal fan base, retailers, and restaurateurs for their support over the prior decade of business.

“There is really nothing more exciting than talking about what could be, the possibilities of something great. The potential, the energy, is palatable here today,” said Welter. “The grit and determination that was needed to get here... if today is any indication, the sky is the limit.”

To prepare the location for development, the City of Valparaiso has invested in necessary environmental cleanup, preserved the historic water tower, and made infrastructure improvements, including aligning the street. “Today this property offers new promise to Valparaiso. Our vision for the future is being realized and we’re very pleased to welcome Journeyman,” said Murphy.

The groundbreaking celebration was attended by hundreds of supporters and included tours of the existing spaces as well as a peek at the plans. Journeyman intends to begin construction in the coming weeks, with plans to open in stages, beginning early in 2023. For more information about Journeyman Distillery, visit Journeyman.com.