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ALERT **TOP STORY**

After 3 ½ years, century-old Bank Calumet tower in Hammond revived, filling up

Joseph S. Pete

Aug 1, 2025



Alan Schachtman cuts the ribbon at the grand opening of The Banc and the Reserve in Hammond.

John J. Watkins The Times



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After 3 1/2 years and \$30 million in investment, developers have revived the century-old Bank Calumet tower in a major step toward the revitalization of downtown Hammond.

Scores of dignitaries gathered Wednesday evening in the grand, high-vaulted, classically pillared lobby of the nine-story bank tower at 5231 Hohman Ave. in downtown Hammond. NWI Hohman LLC, a partnership among NWI Development Group, ASA Real Estate Development and ResElevate, transformed it into 100 market-rate apartments, the Brew Box coffee shop that's slated to open soon and The Reserve: A Grand Venue wedding and special events space.

The tower had sat empty for years after First Midwest Bank left in 2015.

"The electricity was shut off. There was five feet of water in the basement," NWI Development Partner Alan Schachtman said. "But we walked into this space and immediately saw what it could be. The architecture had historic significance."

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First National Bank built the 112-foot-tall building, the largest in Hammond, in 1925. It was later occupied by First Trust and Savings Bank, the Hammond National Bank and Trust Co., law offices and then Bank Calumet, which was one of the Region's largest homegrown banks until it was acquired by Chicago-based First Midwest Bank in 2006.

The historic renovation project turned the former bank offices into modern apartments with views of the Chicago skyline from the sixth to the ninth floors. It was restored with the help of local artisans like Aubrey and Brian Zelenka, the owners of the nearby Paradise Mototiki Lounge, who restored the brasswork, Schachtman said.

"The developers had the vision to recognize the legacy of this historic building and transform it into the architecture beauty you see today," Hammond Chief of Staff Scott Miller said. "What once stood as a vacant, fading landmark is now a vibrant symbol of what Hammond can do when vision meets commitment. The Banc is more than 100 market rate apartments. It's also home to the Brew Box coffee shop, this glorious event space known as the reserve and most importantly a future filled with energy, activity and life."

The transit-oriented development is a short walk from the South Shore Line's future downtown Hammond station.

Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority President and CEO Sherri Ziller said more developments should crop up along the double-track project that is speeding up services between Michigan City and Chicago. It's expected that it will draw 11,000 more residents to live in Northwest Indiana, she said.

"We need as many housing options as we can get: apartments, townhomes, condos, multifamily and single-family," Ziller said. "We need more of everything."

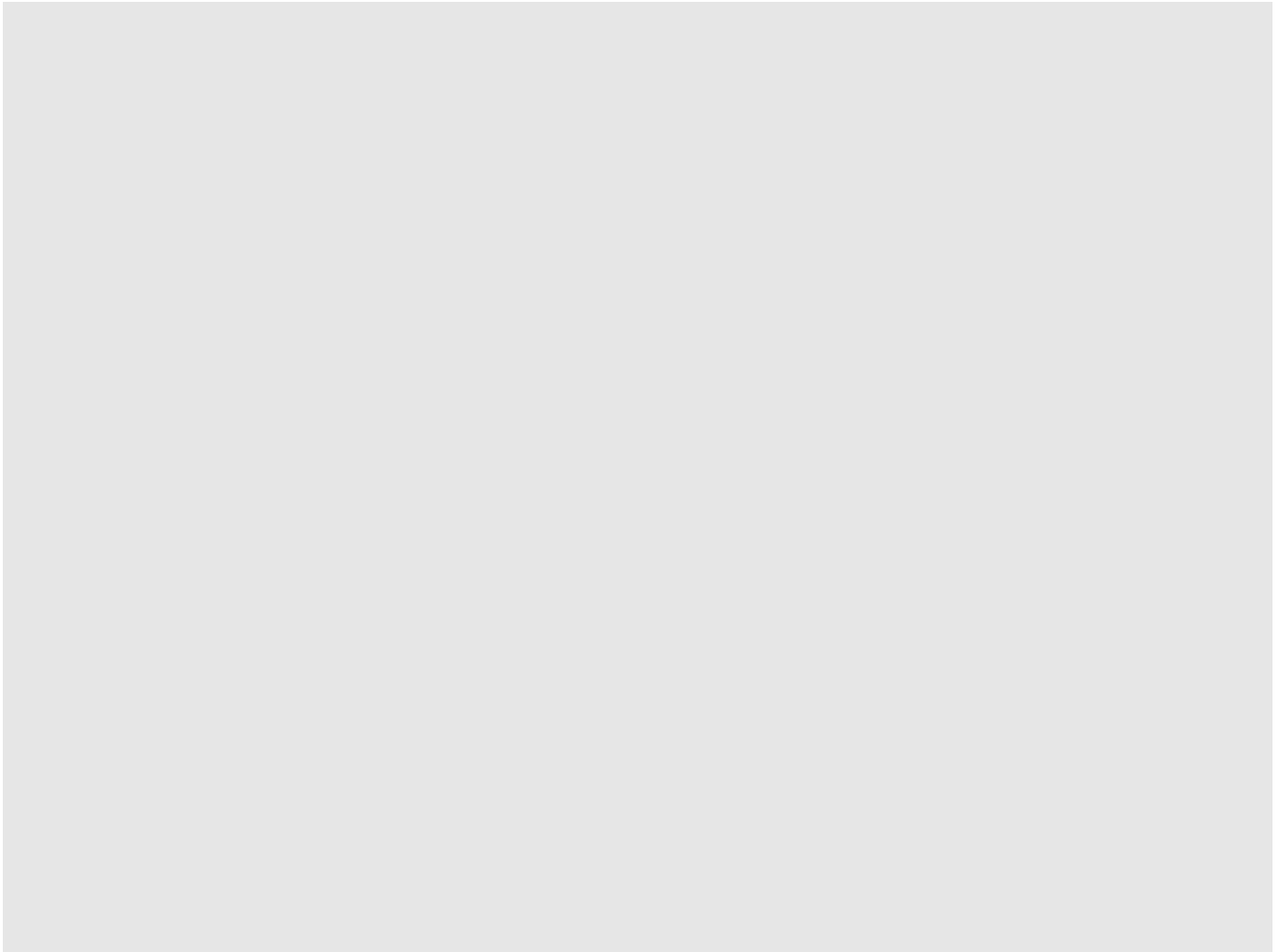
The Banc is also in tandem with a revitalization plan the renowned urban planner Jeff Speck came up with to bring life and activity back to what was once one of Northwest Indiana's biggest hubs for shopping and entertainment but that has become more desolate and fallen on hard times in recent years, losing the former St. Margaret Hospital, the Saint Joseph Catholic Church now slated for closure and other mainstays.

At Speck's suggestion, Hammond redid the infrastructure to make downtown more pedestrian-friendly, including by shrinking Hohman Avenue to two lanes, widening the sidewalks, adding parking in the middle of the street and putting in flower boxes

and other aesthetic enhancements. More investments are planned, including a new quantum research lab across the street.

"This project is the pulse that proves Hammond is progressive and resilient," Miller said. "Because we stayed true to the vision, we overcame all the obstacles and created a space that will define downtown Hammond for the next 100 years."

PHOTOS: Century-old Bank Calumet tower in Hammond revived



Tishina Davis has been a resident at The Banc since April.

John J. Watkins, The Times
