

# Rededicating a 'Crown Jewel': Ribbon cutting ceremony held at Chillicothe's Carlisle building

By Stephanie Stanley Assistant Editor | Posted: Wednesday, October 21, 2015 11:15 am

For over 100 years, the Carlisle building was the “crown jewel” of Chillicothe’s historic district. In April 2003, the building was destroyed in a fire set by arsonists and sat vacant and dilapidated for eight years. On Monday afternoon, locals, officials, architects, and business owners gathered on the corner of Paint and Main Street to take part in a historic ribbon cutting ceremony in which the Carlisle was reopened and reborn.

To open the ceremony, Randy Davies, President and CEO of the Chillicothe Ross Chamber of Commerce, introduced those present and spoke of the significance of the “great occasion.”

“Many of us were standing on this corner on April 25, 2003, and watched the devastating fire, and we are standing here today getting ready to tour one of the most beautiful, if not the best building, now renovated in the state of Ohio,” said Davies. “When we stood here that evening in 2003, watching the fire department working hard as this iconic building was going up in flames, we all wondered what would happen to the cornerstone of our downtown and what the future was going to look like. It has taken many people and many conversations to get to this point today.”

The cornerstone of the Carlisle building, said Davies, was laid on April 11, 1885.

“The Carlisle stood for 128 years as a landmark of our community before the night of the fire. Since then, I’ve called it the largest birdhouse in Ohio, and we are so thrilled to be able to cut the ribbon and have this beautiful building open back up again,” said Davies. “Many of our downtown residents and businesses are starting to take great pride in our downtown community, so when the Carlisle opens, you’ll see other things flourish in the downtown because this has always been the catalyst of making things work in our community. I am thrilled and excited about the good things that will happen in the coming weeks, months, and even years in downtown Chillicothe.”



## Carlisle Building

Officials gathered before a crowd on Monday to cut the ribbon and reopen the Carlisle building, including representatives from the Adena Board of Trustees, Chillicothe City Council, Ross County Commissioners, Chillicothe Ross Foundation, The Chesler Group, Chillicothe Community Improvement Corporation, Ty McBee, Jeff Webb, and the project’s architect Melinda Shaw.

Chillicothe Mayor Jack Everson said he was glad to see the large turnout for the event and thanked the many firefighters in attendance who battled the blaze in 2003 in addition to recognizing his predecessors, Mayor Margaret Planton and Mayor Joe Sulzer.

“Thank you for keeping the faith and keeping this building standing, even when it was unpopular to do,” said Everson, before issuing a proclamation declaring October 19, 2015 as New Carlisle Day in Chillicothe.

“The Carlisle sustained major damage in 2003 due to a deliberately-set fire, and two floors sustained major fire damage and the other two floors sustained major water damage. The building sat vacant and exposed to the elements until 2011, when a non-profit organization, Historic Chillicothe, Inc., bought the Carlisle from Carlisle Tower, LLC., for \$225,000,” said Everson. “In late 2013, the group of historical preservationists sold the building to The Chesler Group, a Cleveland-based firm credited with over 30 historic renovation projects. The Adena Health System, the Chillicothe Ross Community Foundation, Historic Chillicothe, Inc, Jobs Ohio, and The Chesler Group have all done an incredible amount of work to provide the financial backing that has ensured that this iconic building was restored to its original beauty and character. Michael Chesler was clearly the only one who could produce this level of quality in the renovation, based upon his career of impeccable craftsmanship.”

The vision of Adena’s board of directors to invest in the community was a “leap of faith”, said Everson.

“The brilliance of their decision will pay dividends to Adena and this community for years-to-come,” Everson said. “Once The Chesler group began renovations, a true renaissance began in Chillicothe’s downtown, and the excitement has resulted in the sale of 11 downtown buildings that are scheduled for renovation. Now complete, the Carlisle will introduce young interns into downtown life, will be the catalyst for all future business offerings in the downtown, and will educate the next generation of people to the grand, historic significance of this great city. I commend all who have been responsible for taking action to renovate, restore, and preserve this historic structure for the benefit of Chillicothe for many years to come.”

Carlisle developer Michael Chesler has worked in the Chillicothe area for the past three years to renovate the historic landmark building. He spoke to the crowd and reflected on the building and the community’s history, sharing that in the year the Carlisle was built, Mark Twain penned *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the French delivered the Statue of Liberty to the U.S., and Japan elected its first Prime Minister.

“In 1885, I’m sure that a group of residents gathered here on this very spot to talk about a collection of brick, timber, and stone. It was a day of celebration, I’m sure, because their town now had an icon of success. Here we are today, celebrating a historic icon that represents the best of who we are as

men and women,” said Chesler. “The Carlisle was a triple threat — burned, water damage, and neglect. For most, it was a defeat, but for me, it was an opportunity and a challenge ... Like any endeavor, you break down a challenge to its component parts, work methodically, and never give up. While the Carlisle certainly scared me, it helped me to be stronger, smarter, and more diligent. Buildings and architecture represent our most important achievements as humans, and the very fabric of who we are is rooted in our buildings and our homes ... In 1885, the Carlisle established Chillicothe as a success. Today, the Carlisle does it again.”

JobsOhio Senior Managing Director Kristy Tanner shared memories of times spent at the Carlisle building as a Chillicothe resident in the 1990s.

“I spent a great deal of time here on this corner and ate dinner at the Harvester with friends and gathered there for meetings. When the Carlisle burned, I felt sad about what might happen to the downtown as it was such a key part of this community,” she said. “This project was a great fit for us and exactly what we created JobsOhio for, because things like this are vital for keeping our region strong and vibrant. To the city, the county, and all of the residents here, congratulations to you and thank you for everything that you’ve done to support this project.”

Jim Watson, of the Ohio Regional Development Office, attended the rededication ceremony on behalf of Governor John Kasich and Lt. Governor Mary Taylor and shared the following proclamation:

“We commend many individuals who worked together to preserve this historic building. We are grateful for your dedication and commitment to ensuring that Chillicothe’s historic past can be enjoyed by future generations.”

Mark Shuter, president and CEO of Adena Health System, thanked everyone involved in the project and spoke of Adena’s role and legacy in the community.

“Adena’s roots go back to 1895. We started based on Christian values and a vision of meeting community needs, and 120 years later, I’m proud to say that we’re still trying to do the same thing. So many have lifted up prayers for this need in our community, and we see the answer to their prayers and can now take the Carlisle off the list of concerns for this community,” said Shuter.

Adena opened its PACCAR medical education facility in 2008. According to Shuter, PACCAR is “the best in the U.S.”

“This year, we had 185 medical students and these students will be housed in this building. We hope these students will stay in our community and fill our resident physician positions,” said Shuter. “We will continue to recruit students from other communities and decades from now, it will be amazing. This project built many partnerships and relationships throughout the community. This is a major step forward, and I think we can all say how very proud we are on this day.”

After the official ribbon cutting, attendees stood in line to tour the newly-opened facility, which features 32 student apartments and nearly 7,000 square feet of first-floor office space for the Adena Health Foundation, other community-facing personnel and a community room. The \$8 million revitalization project of the Carlisle Building was made possible due to support in the form of loans and grants from organizations including Cortland Banks, JobsOhio, City of Chillicothe, Chillicothe Ross Community Foundation and the Ross County CIC.

Carlisle tours will continue twice-monthly. Those who were unable to attend the ribbon cutting ceremony and rededication of the Carlisle building may schedule a tour by visiting [adena.org](http://adena.org).