



WELCOME TO *Cummins Station*

A COMMUNITY OF RESOURCES

Zach Liff

DZL Management Company

Dear Cummins Station Community Members:

You all give so much of yourselves to create Cummins Station as we experience it today. As we mark the 100 year anniversary of Cummins Station, your gift inspires me to understand that we celebrate a community — not just a building. The development of the Cummins Station Community — your community — is a story worth telling. It's the story of how this location became a place and how our community's industrial consciousness of a century ago transformed into a contemporary awareness we live and breathe today.

While the imprint of many souls enrich the halls of Cummins Station, along the road that leads us to be A Community of Resources there are two people whose vision and investment stand out: William J. Cummins, the creator and developer of Cummins Station, and Noah Liff, my late father. Both men saw opportunity before others did, and both men invested themselves behind their vision.

Visionaries

It takes tremendous vision and emotional fortitude to embark on the herculean task of creating Cummins Station at any time, let alone in 1907 as William Cummins did. Midway through the first decade of the twentieth century, Cummins perceived that a tectonic shift was imminent in downtown Nashville. He saw

that the new Union Station was creating a new center of transportation in the city and therefore a new center of commerce and distribution. Cummins was able to marshal his legendary charisma to convince the distributors and wholesalers along Market Street, now Second Avenue, to capture the value of moving into the heart of this center of commerce and into his new mega-warehouse 10 blocks west from the riverfront. That's where he put the building that still bears his name.

When Cummins Station opened in 1907, it was advertised as the largest reinforced concrete terminal station in the world. Cummins' first tenants no longer had to haul goods from the railhead to warehouses on First Avenue that had been constructed for a different time and a different city. Now, via an 18-foot bottom floor that opened directly onto the train platform, merchants like C.T. Cheek & Sons and Maxwell House Coffee could off-load their wares directly into a new warehouse. They could be squarely in the new center of a city that was moving boldly into a new century.

By the early 1990s, Cummins Station and the immediate area was long neglected. No new investment had been made in the historic structure or its contiguous properties for many years, and the final rail service left the Union Station in 1979, never to return. The following is an excerpt regarding Cummins Station from *Nashville: The Grim and Grace of Tennessee's Capital*, a portfolio written in 1992 by Clinton Mahoney regarding historic buildings and historic preservation in Nashville.

This structure is an example of many of the buildings that are simply not usable for any real purpose. The building has little or no architectural or historical significance. The only reason it hasn't been razed is because the property isn't useful and the cost of razing such a large structure would be enormous.

Truly, the spirit that William J. Cummins and others had infused in this once vibrant center of the city was dormant. The same was still true in 1993. That's when Noah Liff first looked at Cummins Station as an investment opportunity. What follows is an excerpt from the March 1993 edition of *The Nashville Business Journal*:

Developers have eyed Cummins Station for years, envisioning the pre-World War I warehouse for a variety of uses — apartments, offices, retail shops — on the ground floor. But nothing ever happened. "That's because I wasn't involved," claims Noah Liff... "We're going to change the whole nature of that neighborhood. We think it can be used to really enhance the redevelopment of downtown Nashville," he says. "It's a beautiful building. It just needs to be treated with care."

My father was certainly bold in his spirit and predictions, and what I came to learn before he passed away in 2001 is that his exuberance for Cummins Station lied in his belief in community. He was in the recycling business, and he loved to say that we were recycling this building into something new and useful for today. He especially believed in the spirit that was built one step at a time by each new

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Community Member moving into Cummins Station. While others saw Cummins Station as a low-cost warehouse fit for one or two large tenants, my father saw the potential for a new and unique community. He believed in community, and he was compelled by potential, so it was a perfect blend to capture his interest and his spirit.

Being practical men, both Cummins and my father knew that this location is commercially advantageous in Nashville – something of a requirement for a successful real estate investment. However, for my father, that consideration was really only the baseline, because times and people were changing. Cummins Station was a desolate place in 1993, but in Nashville there were the whispers of the desire for a new kind of downtown and a new kind of community. Nashvillians began to want to recapture what was lost in the retreat to the suburbs over past decades, while also wanting an experience that was distinctive and new. Something that brought together a contemporary view of life moving into a new century with new opportunities and places for having that life.

There was no downtown arena. There was no Frist Center, no Schermerhorn Symphony Center, no Gateway Bridge, no high-rise condominiums and almost no residential life downtown. SoBro and the Gulch were industrial borderlands, the provinces of warehouse and wholesalers and businesses that no one patronized after 5 p.m. The Country Music Hall of Fame remained attached to Music Row. A towering

coliseum on the Cumberland River’s east bank was as yet unimagined, almost unimaginable. However, my father’s belief in our community gave him faith that the new spirit in our community would somehow lead to positive growth and development. He also believed that no other property in the city held potential quite like Cummins Station.

Exchange and Transformation

In Cummins’ time, this location was important for material and quantifiable reasons: less distance for goods to travel is more efficient, more productive. That was the reserve of value created by Cummins’ investment one hundred years ago, and indeed he was ahead of his time. A true visionary.

Today, we’re all mostly knowledge and know-how workers. In our world, creativity and efficiency merge – they may even be considered as the same at times. As in Cummins’ day, location is important to us for access and ease of use, yet as knowledge workers, our concept of place is expanded into something relatively less about traditional, quantifiable units of productivity. For Cummins Station Community Members, the quantifiable aspects of “location” are really components of a larger concept of place.

Choosing a place, especially a place like Cummins Station, can contribute to a more refined sense of our own identities. This takes us much beyond basic concepts of productivity and efficiency. This kind of

choice – the choice of where to be – is more dynamic by an order of magnitude as it speaks to who we are and who we are becoming as well as the expression of that process within us. By being here, we make a statement about who we are already and our aspirations for who we want to be. This is somewhat of an economic concern, obviously, but no longer wholly. In addition to efficiency, integrated into this decision is our sense of our creativity and energy, aesthetics, individualism, style, and professionalism – possibly even a personal sense of integrity. It incorporates and contributes to a component of our personal and professional brands and our development as people. Essentially, “where we want to be” becomes a question encompassing so much more than only the idea of a physical location. It can be a metaphysical question regarding our vision of our future selves.

As Community Members choosing to be here, all of us contribute ourselves to a larger sense of place that makes up the identity and character known as “Cummins Station.” In a true exchange, the spirit of our lives here builds and binds together, collecting into a reserve of identity that is able to return to us a unique and differentiating value by which we can partially define and construct our understanding of ourselves.

That is the contemporary commerce and exchange of this place now. The reserve of value in Cummins Station is in the energy and vibrancy from each of you

creating this place alive and anew as a part of your lives everyday. You choose to build, rejuvenate, and transform the energy that William J. Cummins’ large idea birthed one hundred years ago. You make the regeneration of an historic location into a vibrant and visionary place now and into the future. The opportunity we receive in Cummins Station is what we can take from its vibrant reserve of value to contribute to our individual development and a more distinguishing definition of ourselves.


DZL’s Promise to You

DZL Management Company’s role and promise is to ensure the fulfillment of this contemporary vision and exchange. DZL alone cannot create community any more than we can create historic value – but we can recognize it and be its steward and foundation – a respectful caretaker for the connectivity, creativity, and professionalism in the Cummins Station Community today and into the future. And our stewardship should be additive. We promise that it will be. We will continue to help guide the community and energy here so you can be secure in the opportunity this Community of Resources can provide for you while you focus on what’s important to you. We know you have things to get done, and doing those things is how you make this home for people and businesses so special. That is your contribution. It’s a gift. Thank you for giving it.

It is my personal belief, inherited and influenced from my father's vision, that being a part of something like Cummins Station is an historic opportunity. Please accept my sincerest appreciation for your choice to be a significant person in a life on the forefront of contemporary community building and development. A unique life in which our connectivity, vibrancy, personality, and professionalism combine to be much more than the

sum of those parts. You are the life which is this place. We are a Community and Exchange. A Resource and Opportunity. We are A Community of Resources.

Very truly yours,



Zach Liff
DZL Management Company, LLC

Vibrant Today

In an interview with Bill Moyers in 1987, the famous anthropologist Joseph Campbell stated the following: "The goal of your quest for yourself is to find that burning point in yourself, that becoming...just becoming...that's life in movement...It's the coming into being that's it, and that's the life point in you."

Cummins Station is home to more than 170 businesses and so many more people in them — and that speaks only to today. Over the past one hundred years, countless more souls have explored our halls for one reason or another, and many people have spent significant portions of their lives here. For most Nashvillians, the image of this place leaves a permanent imprint on their understanding of our city — whether their mind's eye sees the early and contemporary vibrant years or the dormant years in between depends on each person and each perspective. To the wider community, over the past century Cummins Station has represented today, the future, the past, today, and the future again. We now have one hundred years of history to tell us: except for the people who choose to live their lives substantially here, our Community of Resources could never exist. So we're here and moving into the future together only because of each one of our Community Members.

In celebrating one hundred years since Cummins Station opened its doors on April 1, 1907, it is difficult to decide which stories to tell. There are just so many that created our community and that continue to move us forward. The companion piece to this book entitled, *Cummins Station: The History of a*

Nashville Icon, written by Bill Carey offers surprisingly more intrigue and interesting tales than you might expect, and Mr. Carey provides a more than adept telling of Cummins Station's story. We hope you will find time to read it.

We at DZL Management Company decided that what is most important about one hundred years of history is being here now. History is important to us because it lends the whole of itself to our understanding of where we are today and where we're pointing, if we let it. It provides enlightenment regarding our present options and the untraveled roads before us. What follows is not only an artistic expression representing the contemporary spirit and scenery of Cummins Station, but also the story of some of our Community Members whose lives are crossing paths with this historic place, and whose energy and efforts help to build it into its contemporary station. It is their becoming — along with all of yours — that lends the vibrant energy to Cummins Station that distinguishes it from other places. Like these few stories, the lives of all Cummins Station Community Members are a part of this new place and community that bears William J. Cummins' name.

We hope you enjoy their stories and see a reflection of your own contribution to the Cummins Station Community in them. And we hope you take at least as much from this place as you so generously give.

Sincerely,
The DZL Team

