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Real Estate Insider

Michigan Central's new neighbor is a bohemian preschool

By Kirk Pinho



Credit: CoStar Group Inc.

The former St. Vincent middle school building in Corktown near Michigan Central Station.

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The Michigan Central electric and autonomous vehicle campus in Corktown is in line to get a new neighbor: An early childhood education center.

A nonprofit closed on the \$3.3 million purchase of the former St. Vincent middle school and a next-door lot next to [Newlab](#), located in a renovated former Detroit Public Schools Book Depository building, and Michigan Central Station with plans to turn it

into an early childhood center called Kintsugi Village. Kintsugi Village was founded by entrepreneur Paul Spiegelman and Hamsa Daher.

The former St. Vincent school was previously owned by Jean-Michel "Mitch" Wasterlain, who is a co-founder along with Shannon Hill of Next Cities Investments, based in New York. That company owns the Elevator Building on Franklin Street on the east Detroit riverfront, as well as other properties in the area.

Wasterlain said that when his company bought the building in July 2021, the previous tenants had already vacated or were in the process of doing so.

The Detroit office of Toronto-based Avison Young and Detroit-based O'Connor Real Estate brokered the deal.

Wasterlain and Hill are "pleased to see the St. Vincent School building return to its educational roots," Wasterlain said in an email. "Kintsugi Village will be a key player in the growth and evolution of Corktown."

In 2014, Curbed Detroit described the former middle school as "[among Corktown's most overlooked abandoned buildings](#)," saying that it was "the last vestige" of a campus that included schools and a church. "Urban renewal" efforts in the 1950s by the city resulted in tearing down large parts of the neighborhood, starting a long slide in membership that eventually resulted in the school's closure in 2002, per Curbed.

Now to what's next expected with Kintsugi Village.

The center — which Spiegelman says gets its name from a Japanese word meaning "join with gold" and is an art form involving fixing broken pottery — would charge little to no tuition for those with financial need.

Kintsugi Village, a 501(c)3, would sustain itself through tuition from parents able to afford it and revenue from the event center, plus fundraising with the philanthropic and corporate communities, Spiegelman said.

There would be four main components to the project: the early childhood education center, with perhaps 75 to 100 youngsters taking part; an incubator space for local up and coming artists to work and teach kids; a community retreat center; and a culinary kitchen. The vacant lot would be a community garden and greenhouse, Spiegelman said. The center is currently planning programming for children ages 3 to 5 years of age, but that may change.

"All of this is really subject to community input as we get started here," he said.

Kintsugi would focus on teaching kids things including "understanding money, healthy eating, building relationships, mindfulness, setting intentions and journaling," according to its website.

Neumann/Smith Architecture has been retained as the project architect while Sachse Construction is the general contractor, Spiegelman said. The project budget has not yet been determined, and work is expected to begin early next year in preparation for an anticipated fall 2025 opening, he said.

Spiegelman wound up in Detroit — where he says he spends much of his time these days — by way of a nonprofit he started nine years ago called Small Giants Community, which does things like leadership academies for emerging business leaders. The executive director Small Giants hired at the time is Daher and she is based here so, bingo, the nonprofit is based here, too. And that's what first introduced Spiegelman to Detroit and the region.

"I fell in love with the city and have enjoyed it ever since I first visited in 2016," he said.

He made his money with the 2013 sale of a company he founded, BerylHealth, to medical waste services provider Stericycle Inc., based in Illinois. He would not disclose the sale price, and I couldn't find it in filings for the publicly-traded Stericycle (Nasdaq: SRCL). Stericycle is in the process of being sold to Houston-based WM for \$7.2 billion.

Kintsugi Village would join another early childhood education center in the general area in the works. [Starfish Family Services and IFF are also planning one](#), my colleague Sherri Welch reported in July.

By **Kirk Pinho**

Kirk Pinho is a senior reporter covering commercial real estate. Since joining Crain's Detroit Business in 2013, he has written about leasing, development and property sales in Detroit and its suburbs, as well as the industry's trends,