

# A royal groundbreaking augurs a sea change in perception

**A**isle say...

by Greer Firestone

“A year from now, downtown Wilmington will be a different place.”

Bill Taylor, Light Up The Queen Foundation executive director ended our conversation last week on this confident note. A testimony to his vision or his hubris? Time will tell.

The Queen breaks ground on its \$24 million renovation 10 a.m. Oct. 2. Aisle Say is the first to report. A spate of dignitaries with ceremonial hard hats and silver tipped shovels will be on display that day followed by what Taylor describes as “the biggest street party in the history of Wilmington.”

A great accomplishment, this fund raising, this corralling of public and private resources, this incorporation of Hal Real of Philly's World Cafe Live into the entertainment mix.

But it's not about the money, and the single biggest threat to its success has never been material.

It's always been that amorphous dreaded "perception" of downtown after dark -- the same problem that has hovered above Market Street for decades like the wispy apparitions from “Ghostbusters.”

## Is Wilmington safe after 5 p.m.?

This is the fundamental issue that must be resolved to the public's satisfaction. Nothing else comes close. And perception, dear readers, is most difficult to quantify and reconcile. The question has haunted downtown since Rob and Chris Buccini were in lower school at Wilmington Friends and

our riverfront was a desolate toxic graveyard of shipbuilding sites.

Steve Bailey, The Grand executive director, says the facts are clear: Wilmington is a much safer downtown than the majority of cities its size. Even so, people are fearful.

Thus, Taylor's adamant statement that substantive relief – think John Wayne as a calvary captain in “Fort Apache” – is over the horizon.

“We have made a major investment in safety and police protection,” he says. “There will be police patrolling on foot and bike. When The Queen opens, there will be security guards in and around the venue at all times. Our success is based on safety.”

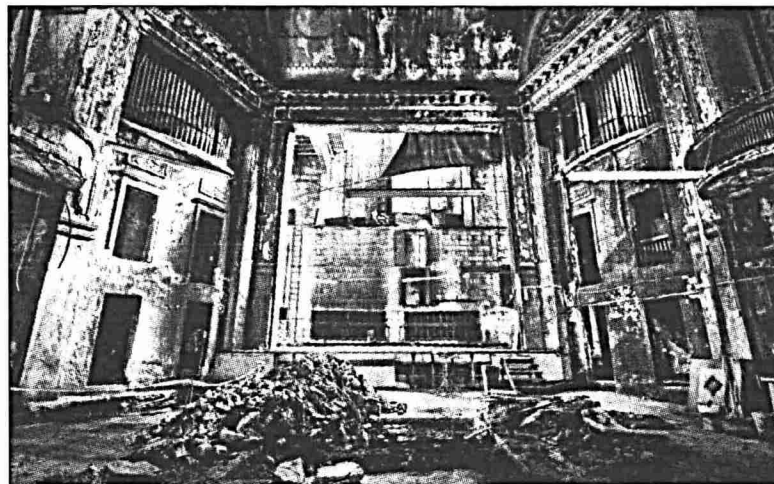
Buccini Pollin Group has invested tens of millions of dollars in the city. They have staked their personal reputations on downtown's success.

For Rob Buccini, The Queen, at 5th & Market streets is the cen-

terpiece of downtown, linking their Residences of Rodney Square apartments to Justison Landing and their high rise and low rise developments on the Riverfront. Even now, construction is in full swing to turn the Great Room of The Residences into a new restaurant, The Publick House. Across the street at the former WSFS headquarters, the BPGGroup is deciding what to do with this property. Once proposed as a boutique hotel, those plans have been dropped.

The 18-month Queen construction project will eventually house a venue for 800 guests and a restaurant serving 200 -- not unlike the World Cafe Live in Philly. There will be private event spaces on the Market Street side and studios for a WXPN satellite radio station. Giving back with a plethora of education is in the mix as well.

For more information, visit [LightUpTheQueen.org](http://LightUpTheQueen.org)



**Queen Theater in Wilmington breaks ground on its \$24 million renovation 10 a.m., Oct. 2.**

