

# Landmark Success

**Author:** Nathan

Tom Austen and John DiGuseppe have been transforming a 19th century factory floor into 21st century banquet space. A National Grid economic development grant was critical to their project's success.

Built in 1892 as an organ factory, the Wurlitzer Building on Niagara Falls Boulevard is a North Tonawanda landmark. At one time, it was home to the world's largest musical instrument manufacturing plant. At its peak, leading up to and after World War II, up to 5,000 workers were employed at the 750,000-square-foot complex, which made organs and jukeboxes.

In its heyday, the campus included fountains, Italian statues, manicured hedges and wrought-iron fencing. Production at the building ceased in the mid-1970s when Wurlitzer moved its operations to Illinois. The building closed in 1977.

Since buying the building in 1992, Tom Austen and his wife, Jane, have renovated it and drawn tenants from a range of industries. Among them are a plumbing wholesaler, attorneys' offices and a restaurant equipment company.

The building is also home to [Platter's Chocolates](#), whose owners, John and Sherry DiGuseppe, were in need of an electric equipment upgrade. John and Tom worked with National Grid lead economic development representative **Mary Grace Welch** to complete an application for a \$100,000 economic development grant to meet the need.

John said that if it wasn't for National Grid's assistance, his company would not have been able to move into its new space, which is essentially a new building within the old one. The Platter's space includes plenty of customer seating, shelves filled with candy, and a view that offers visitors the opportunity to watch Platter's expert candy makers work their craft.

"We now have a state-of-the-art building with an electric system that allows us to control the climate and store chocolate at the appropriate temperatures," said John. "This was vital to our ability to make high-quality chocolate; we couldn't do without that system."

Of National Grid's support of their projects, he said, "It gave us courage to move forward."

He and Tom also have also built two [banquet facilities](#) at the site and have been hosting weddings and other events.

"We had to increase and update the infrastructure, and on a complex of this size, we needed help. Mary Grace helped us from National Grid with a grant to update the switchgear," said Tom. "We couldn't have gone forward unless we had their assistance."

The \$100,000 economic development grant was made available through National Grid's Industrial Building Redevelopment program. The program provides grants of up to \$250,000 to building owners who are retrofitting interior gas or electric infrastructure to convert their building to multi-tenant use.

For more information about National Grid economic development programs, visit [www.shovelready.com](http://www.shovelready.com).

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