

# Poke About Town

BY JAN WONDRA



**THEY CALL IT DEPOT PARK.** The newest proposal for the old Milwaukee Railroad Depot on Washington Ave. was revealed last week to a who's who group that included the press and Mayor Don Fraser, representatives of the ISDC (Industry Square Development Co.) and the financial, retail and hotel communities plus the Park Board.

It's the brainchild of two young entrepreneurs, Steve Shapiro and Michel McCall, who enlisted the support and financial backing of Wheelock Whitney, civic leader, landowner, investor and health promoter. The entire Whitney family has become involved, and wife Irene Whitney has become chairman of the Depot Development Co. It was formed with the express purpose of developing the 16 acres surrounding the historic depot.

This proposal didn't just happen over night. Shapiro and McCall have spent a combined total of five years planning and hustling to bring their dream to proposal form. Both were first involved when the Wilson Learning Corp. was interested in the area. They decided they had "nothing to lose," as Shapiro puts it, and began "creating a new community."

The project plan calls for a mixed-use complex, which will include condominiums, office space, two acres of indoor/outdoor urban park, a hotel, a health club, 100,000 square feet of office space and 1600 parking stalls. All of this for an estimated cool \$115,000 million in development costs.

The Depot's architectural significance will be the focal point of the design, with a waterway and paths to the riverfront and Skyways joining it to the heart of the business district. The proximity of the new stadium is a factor in the design, which is meant to reinforce the return of the public to a once bustling area of the city.

The Depot Development Team is impressive. Warren Beck (of Galleria and Bonaventure development) will develop the retail area. Larry Laukka (Lyn Park, Dewey Hill and Edina York) will develop the housing area. Morris Levy (developer of L'hotel Sofitel and of the family who created the famous Dyckman Hotel, now consultant to Sofitel International) will create the quality hotel.

The architect, David Bennett (BRW Architects and projects too numerous to mention) plans to reuse the historic buildings. "Keeping their integrity intact and making them the jewel of the development," he explains. The decision may take until the end of the year. Meantime, the jury is out on this and other plans. Whichever one wins, hope the best interests of Minneapolis are in mind, as this plan seems to demonstrate: