

Photo above: DAVID BREWSTER • dbrewster@startribune.com, photo below: RICHARD SENNOTT • rsennott@startribune.com
Entrepreneur Steve Schussler, in his all-ice bar, says he would make the barn, below, "a proud piece of Minnesota history and Eden Prairie history."

A bid for history

By LAURIE BLAKE • lblake@startribune.com

Entrepreneur Steven Schussler — creator of Rain Forest Cafe, Hard Rock Cafe and Galaxy Drive In — is coming to the rescue of the historic arch-roof dairy barn on Pioneer Trail in Eden Prairie.

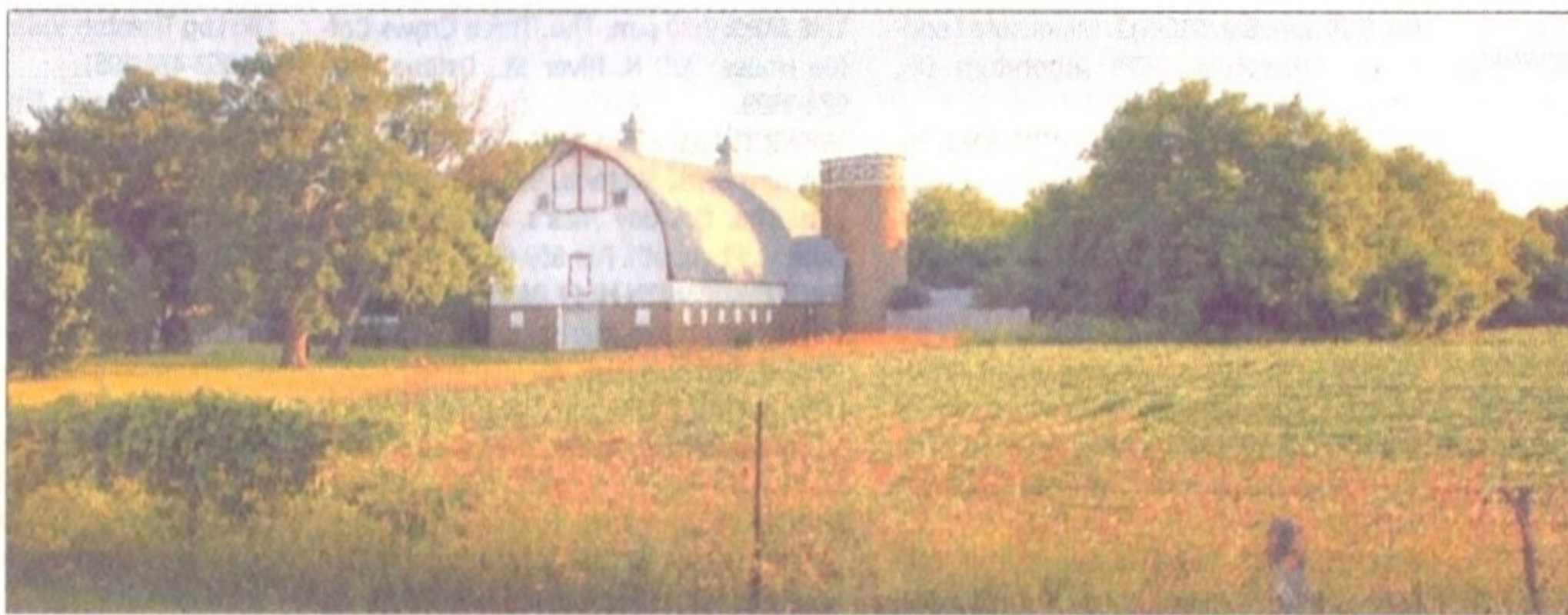
"It's a beautiful piece of architecture," Schussler said. "I believe I can make it look beautiful and utilize it for our business."

Schussler offered Hennepin County \$82,000, the lone bid for the 1940's-era barn and the circle of land around it.

After the bid opening on Sept. 7, the county entered into a closed process to decide whether to accept the bid and award the barn to Schussler.

No sentimental farm boy, Schussler said his memories of barns actually arise from his childhood in New York City, when he rode horses in Central Park. He plans to landscape,

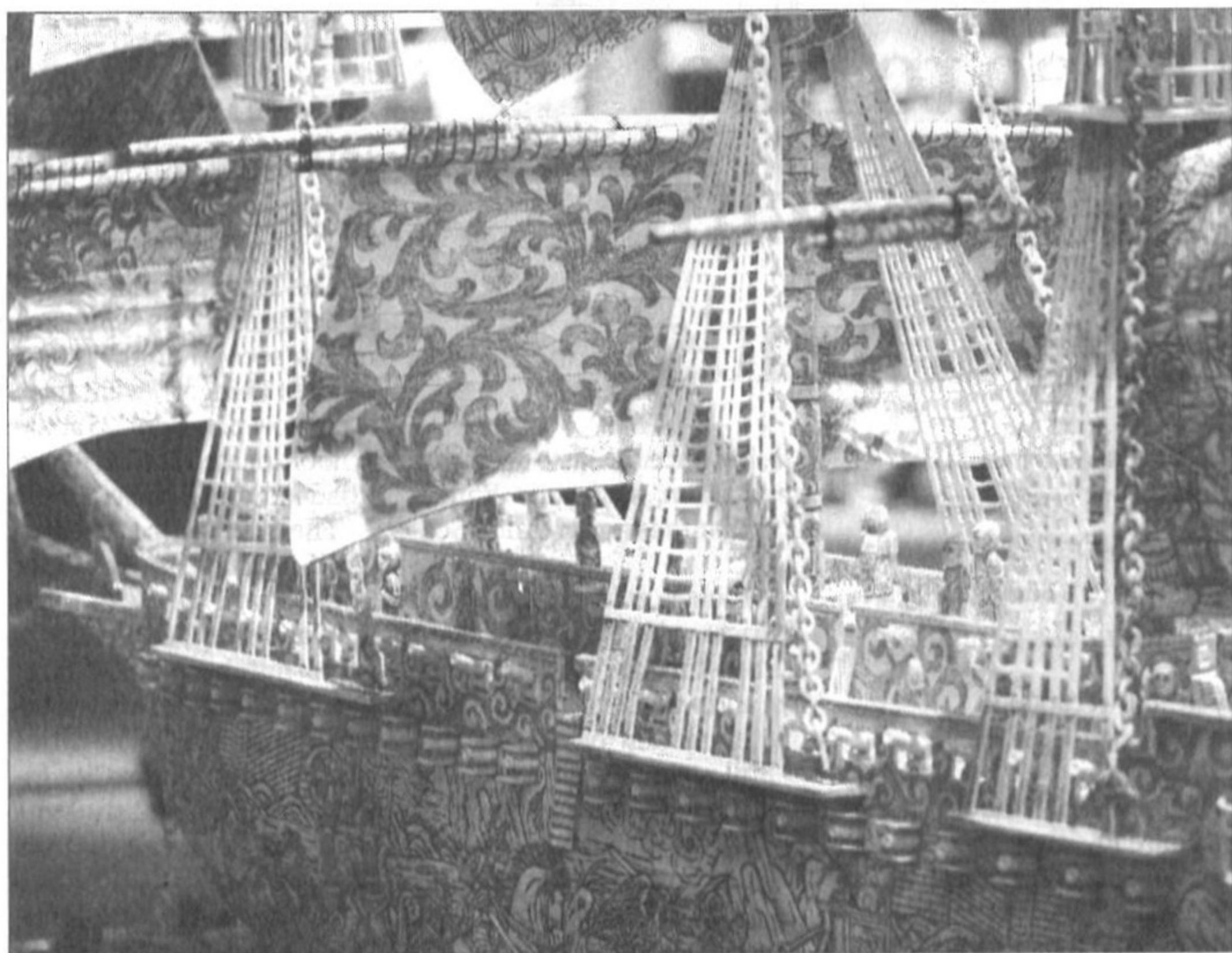
Steve Schussler read about the plight of the Eden Prairie barn in the newspaper and ended up making the only bid to save it.



paint and light the barn to "make it a proud piece of Minnesota history and Eden Prairie history."

But he has no plans to turn it into one of the themed businesses for which he is known.

Barn continues on AA5 ►



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This Chinese ivory ship is part of Schussler's collection. The barn could provide storage for artifacts.

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◀ BARN FROM AA1

Hennepin County bought the barn and the farm it stood on for the widening of Pioneer Trail. After the barn's historic value was determined, state officials told the county to avoid tearing it down.

Having no interest in owning the barn and unable to give it to the state or the city of Eden Prairie, the county offered the barn to bidders, with the intention of tearing it down if no one came forward.

So many expressions of interest came in that the county postponed the bid opening for a week to give all of them a chance. But in the end, Schussler's was the only bid.

The county had asked for a minimum bid of \$60,000 for the land and barn.

Schussler is still deciding

how he might use the barn. "I like giving back and I need storage and that barn is historical."

His firm, Schussler Creative Inc., dreams up theatrical environments and sells them as the signature theme settings for restaurants, retail stores and attractions. At the firm's Golden Valley headquarters, Schussler has a workshop with showrooms featuring towering dinosaurs and a sparkling ice cave. Another room celebrates winter, and still another is built around the jazz era. Two big rooms are full of museum-quality Chinese artifacts with life-sized statues of warriors, some on horses, lining the walls.

The barn, with its 60-foot-high ceilings, would offer more space for such creations or for storage, Schussler said.

"Where are you going to find a 60-foot ceiling?" he said. "Nowhere. With a 60-foot ceiling you could do a lot of things."

"We have a 100-year-old carousel. There are not a lot of places you could fit a 100-year-old carousel. And we develop themes around cars and motorcycles and have to have storage for those."

Marooned by the road-widening project, the barn comes with a circle of land around it and a driveway entrance from Pioneer Trail, but not enough space for parking to turn it into a big public attraction.

Either as a creative laboratory or a storage location, the barn would be on display only from the outside and not open to the public, Schussler said.

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