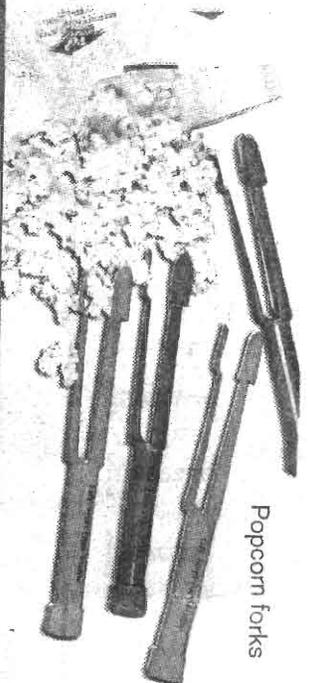


**TOMORROW'S WEATHER**  
 HIGH 40  
 LOW 26  
 Mostly cloudy, a shower.  
 Details on Page C10

**TODAY IN**  
**FRI DAY**  
 THE ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

**Oddball presents**  
 A guide to strange gifts that are better to give than receive



Popcorn forks

**ALSO IN FRIDAY**  
**Three big stars hit the jackpot in 'Ocean's Eleven'**

# Kalamazoo Gazette

Friday, December 7, 2001

Kalamazoo, Michigan

★ 50¢

# Downtown arena in works?

*WMI trustees expected to discuss donation of land including former Cole-Gilmore dealership.*

**BY CHRIS KNAPE and LYNN TURNER KALAMAZOO GAZETTE**

The first major step toward creating a downtown arena may take place today as Western Michigan University's Board of Trustees is expected to decide whether it will accept seven acres of mostly vacant downtown property.

Kalamazoo area businessmen Joseph Gesmundo and Tom Cole have agreed to donate the land to WMI for an undetermined major development.

Trustees are expected to discuss the donation when they go into executive session near the end of their board meeting this afternoon. University spokesman Matt Kurtz said he could not comment on the matter.

"We cannot speak on what they may or may not be acting on when they go into executive session," he said. "If they make a decision, then we will report out of the meeting the action they have taken."

"The reasons they go into executive session is not something we can discuss."

Public bodies are allowed to go into a closed session for several reasons, including the purchase or lease of property.

If Cole and Gesmundo get their way, the site will be home to a new athletic arena to house WMI's basketball program and host other community events.

"We want it to be used for a significant project for both the community and the university," said Gesmundo, who said WMI could provide details about the donation if it accepts the land.

Gesmundo said any development will likely take five to 10 years to get off the ground and cost tens of millions of dollars — much of which would likely need to be raised from private sector donors or from a local tax levy.

Ken Nacci, president of Downtown Kalamazoo Inc., which owns about three acres of land around the dealership property, said his organization has always thought in terms of a "large traffic generator" on that spot. That could be an arena, a multi-screen or IMAX movie theater or the like.

Please see **ARENA?**, A4

## Proposed arena site

Kalamazoo area businessmen Joseph Gesmundo and Tom Cole are donating seven acres of mostly vacant downtown property to Western Michigan University, in hopes the site will be developed into an athletic arena.



Source: Gazette research

KRIS KINKADE / GAZETTE

America marks

Pearl Harbor survivor Richard

'T...'

# ARENA?

From Page A1

"We've never done a feasibility study on any specific thing," he said, adding that he looks forward to working with WMU officials visualizing the best development of that site. "An arena's one project. It's been floated out there before, two years ago."

Nacci warned, though, that arenas can be risky ventures and shouldn't be looked at as a panacea for the entire downtown core, even though "everybody looks to Grand Rapids and the Van Andel Arena and the spin-off there," he said.

Five years of community planning went into Van Andel Arena before the doors opened in October 1996, said Lynne Ike, marketing director of the arena. The \$68 million project, which sits on a full city block, was funded through a mixture of private and public dollars.

Independent from their negotiations with WMU, Cole and Gesmundo have commissioned an architectural rendering of an arena on the site in an effort to spur interest in such a project.

The property has been the subject of speculation since the 1980s, when the city began developing the Arcadia Commons project on the north end of downtown. Gesmundo, Cole and the estate of Jim Gilmore jointly own the property. Gesmundo said he and Cole were purchasing Gilmore's interest before making the gift.

A portion of the site once housed the Cole-Gilmore car dealership. The old dealership is now leased month-to-month to a variety of businesses.

if WMU took control of the property, it would represent the university's first major holding downtown.

"Our goals and objectives from '92 were to save it and keep it in one piece until something came along that we thought would benefit both the community and university," Gesmundo said. "Although that something hasn't been determined, we've got some strong ideas of what we'd like to see."

Bill Johnston, owner of the Radisson Plaza Hotel at Kalamazoo Center, said talk of a downtown arena did not influence his plans to expand and renovate the facility, but he said he sees such a development as a positive for the community.

"It's hard to imagine how a downtown arena with a strong connection to Western Michigan University would not help," he said. "I would be very much in favor of it. It would be good for the university and good for Kalamazoo. It would be a traffic generator and offer a lot of economic spin-off."

WMU President Elson Floyd has said he is interested in pursuing a project in downtown Kalamazoo, but wants to ensure it is something that could be done in conjunction with other community groups.

Floyd has a rendering hanging in his office of a proposed College of Engineering and Applied Sciences campus on the same site given to him by Gesmundo before the university had finalized its plan to build the new college at its Lee Baker Farm property at the west end of Kalamazoo.

The university has expressed a long-term need for a larger and more versatile facility for its basketball program. University Arena, which was built in the early 1990s, is considered by many to be too small for a Division 1A basketball program.

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