

Wednesday, June 19, 2013

## It's Terminal but Backers Hope to Keep Worldport Alive

By LANA BORTOLOTT

Advocates for the now-vacant Worldport terminal at Kennedy Airport hope their preservation efforts will gain momentum with the bittersweet designation of the former Pan Am building as one of America's 11 most-endangered historic places.

The annual list, compiled by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and slated for release Wednesday, selects architectural and cultural heritage sites in danger of destruction or damage. The flying-saucer shaped Worldport, long-slated for demolition to make room for more operating space at the airport, was sited for its symbolic jet-age architecture.

Constructed in 1960 by Pan American World Airways, the building was known for its large elliptical roof canopy, measuring

450 by 350 feet, which allowed aircraft to taxi under it, providing protective covering for passengers between the plane and the terminal. It was famously featured as a backdrop for the Beatles as they departed on a Pan Am Boeing 707 after their 1964 U.S. tour, and epitomized the glamour of jet travel in movies such as "Come Fly With Me" and the 1962 "That Touch of Mink," starring Cary Grant and Doris Day.

Delta Air Lines assumed the building and other Pan Am assets when the carrier collapsed in 1991. Renamed Terminal 3, it was in use until May 23, when Delta opened the adjacent \$1.4 billion Terminal 4 the next day.

"This is the last moment of [modernist buildings] being unloved; the tide is turning," said Roberta Lane, the National Trust's New York-based senior

field officer. "It's painful to think we might lose this on the cusp of this time when people are starting to get it." The Worldport is the only site in the tristate area on the group's latest endangered list.

Past efforts to protect the building were unsuccessful. Though determined eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988, it was never so designated. By the time the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns the site, requested a 2001 review of the building, it had lost much of its panache, especially in the shadow of the more illustrious TWA terminal designed by Eero Saarinen.

"They almost ridiculed the architecture, saying it wasn't interesting and it's not what it used to be," said Anthony Stramaglia,

*Please turn to page A20*



Construction workers set up a fence at the former Worldport Terminal at Kennedy Airport on Tuesday.

*Continued from page A17*

an organizer, along with Kaley Savi and Lisa Turano Wojcik, of a group called Save the Worldport. Ms. Wojcik's father, Emanuel Turano, was one of the building's principal designers.

The trio has petitioned Delta, the Port Authority and the National Parks Service to stay demolition of the site. They hope that what National Trust designation did for the TWA Flight Center—named an endangered site in 2004 and listed on the National Register the next year—will also help the Worldport. The TWA building underwent a \$20 million restoration and is slated to become a boutique hotel under proposals being solicited by the Port Authority.

"We're hoping the announcement will carry us a little further," Mr. Stramaglia said. "I think if there's more public awareness, there would be more backlash about this. It just hasn't hit home. It's an airport—it's nothing [people] think of every day."

Architectural writer John Morris Dixon, who sits on the board of the local chapter of Docomomo, an organization dedicated to preserving modernist architecture, said that while the canopy was dramatic and romantic, "It was somewhat dated when people started using jet ways. It was a fascinating idea, but no one ever really copied that one."

Delta spokeswoman Leslie Scott said the Worldport could no longer serve either the airline or its passengers.

"Space-wise, it really wasn't



A view of Pan Am's Worldport Terminal in 1961. The building later was taken over by Delta and closed in May.

designed for today's air travel," she said. "You had a small lobby and the queue for security was in a tight space. Terminal 4 is by far a better customer experience by leaps and bounds." She added, "The path we're going down is exactly what we announced. Space at JFK is restricted, and that space is valuable to us operationally."

Though the Port Authority also restored the Marine Air Terminal at La Guardia and Building 51 at Newark Liberty—a National Historic Landmark that is now used for administration—it is unable to justify adaptive reuse for the Worldport.

"The old Pan Am Worldport terminal at JFK served this region for more than a half century, but is obsolete for 21st century aviation purposes," a Port Authority spokesman said. "JFK is a land-constrained airport and the space where the Worldport is located cannot be set aside for preservation because it is needed for other aviation uses that will lead to job creation and economic growth."

If efforts fail to prevent the terminal's destruction, preservationists hope for restoration of a Worldport relic—the Zodiac Screen of bronze sculptures by Milton Hebal. The bas-relief

work, once one of the largest sculptural pieces in the world, is now in Port Authority storage.

Alex Herrera, a technical director at the New York Landmarks Conservancy, who has worked on the TWA restoration, says that while it might be too late to save the Worldport building, displaying the bronzes would provide a fitting memory.

"The screen and the TWA terminal would be the two iconic relics of the airport in its early heyday," he said. "I think those two items will be real contributions to the airport, which needs something in terms of an aesthetic or visual uplift."