

Internet mogul plans Sloatsburg cyclists resort

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Michael Bruno built his fortune in high-end art and antiques sales but has turned his vision to bringing cyclists to the Sloatsburg-Tuxedo corridor.



(Photo: Tuxedo Hudson Company)

SLOATSBURG - Entrepreneur Michael Bruno made a fortune by connecting antique dealers in Paris with collectors around the world via the internet.

He's now looking to connect the Hudson Valley's natural beauty and locally-grown produce with cyclists and hikers by providing rooms to stay overnight and places to dine in the Route 17 corridor from Sloatsburg to Tuxedo.

Bruno, the founder of [1stdibs](https://www.1stdibs.com/) (<https://www.1stdibs.com/>), an online marketplace for high-end art and antiques, has recently spent millions of dollars to purchase nearly two dozen buildings in the area, including 18 structures on a total of 15 acres in Sloatsburg along Route 17.

He launched [Tuxedo Hudson Company](http://tuxedohudsoncompany.com/) (<http://tuxedohudsoncompany.com/>) LLC in January and has begun transforming the Sloatsburg village center, calling it a first step toward a \$20 million-plus grand vision that would encompass a hotel, shops and restaurants near the Sloatsburg train station; an antique-and-art shopping destination at the 12-acre Stewart Farm property near the Sloatsburg-Tuxedo border; and a hikers retreat/food market, a restaurant, and possibly a roadside rotisserie chicken place in Tuxedo.

"The reason I feel so strongly about this project is the natural beauty that surrounds the area," said Bruno, who has lived in Tuxedo Park for the past several years. "We're in the middle of 70,000 acres of state park here.

"If you have that much of natural beauty — with trails and lakes, hiking and biking, kayaking — this close to the city, with nowhere to stay, nowhere to eat healthy organic food, then if we can provide that, I believe people will come. Why wouldn't they?"



Michael Bruno, of Tuxedo Hudson Company, photographed in the courtyard of the Blue Barn Market in Sloatsburg on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2016. (Photo: John Meore/The Journal News)

Historic charm

The Sloatsburg-Tuxedo corridor, spanning the Rockland and Orange County border, has largely been left out of waves of development in the past half century.

That's part of the reason why he is attracted to the area, Bruno said.

"This area has a lot of beautiful, old buildings along Route 17. Not a lot happened here in a while, and that's the good news because things weren't ruined. Often, when there's a lot of development, they tear things down and build chain stores," Bruno said. "This place still has a very rural feeling. Buildings are still in good condition."

One of the clusters of Bruno's properties is located on 2.5 acres across from the Sloatsburg library, a short walk from the Sloatsburg train station. Bruno has marked off the properties — including the former Blue Barn Antiques building and four Victorian homes — with white farm fences and has installed white pebbles to fill up the ground between buildings. He renovated the blue barn and created a courtyard using the foundations of a larger barn that had burned down decades ago. He's also modernizing the Victorian homes with plans to make them a bed-and-breakfast.

Under his "Hudson Valley first" focus, Bruno said, locally-grown produce will play a big part in his restaurants and markets.

In August, Bruno opened up the renovated barn — newly equipped with a walk-in refrigerator — as a weekend farm stand, offering fresh produce harvested by farmers in Chester, New York. Vegetables sold out every weekend, and shoppers enjoyed baked goods and prepared food at outdoor tables. The farm stand attracted nearly 500 people over a recent weekend, he said.

"People were so excited. They were at every table," Bruno said.

From vision to plans

Sloatsburg village Mayor Carl Wright, who visited the property during a recent open house, said he welcomed Bruno's investment.

"He has energized the area. He has a vision that will make Sloatsburg and Tuxedo even more attractive place for a people to visit and shop," Wright said. "The future always belongs to those who offer the greatest hope and provide the greatest vision."

Bruno said the area is zoned for a commercial-residential mixed use under the village's code, and operating a bed-and-breakfast out of the four Victorian houses is within the allowable uses.

But constructing a 50-room hotel, two restaurants, and "mews" — or a row of a coffee house, a juice bar, a gym and a bicycle shop — on the remaining portion of the 2.5-acre block would require Bruno to get approvals from the village's Board of Trustees and land use boards.

Bruno, who is the sole investor for his project, said he's aiming to open the bed and breakfast in the spring, with the rest to follow.

Architects for Tuxedo Hudson Company have been concentrating on developing plans to renovate the old IGA Market in Tuxedo into a hikers-hub/market. But they will soon start working on the plans for Sloatsburg, Bruno said.

"The hotel gears toward people who like cycling. The property is well situated them to get to the Harriman State Park without going on Route 17. And it has the train station one side, and the bus stop on the other," Bruno said. "We expect people to come in for the weekend."

Neile Weissman, a former president of New York Cycle Club, said the availability of local lodging would open up the area to more types of cyclists.

"Right now, people who are accessing those roads in the (Harriman) area are strong cyclists who can make a (day) trip from New York City," Weissman said. "But if there's a place to stay, people who can ride only 30 to 40 miles can experience the same roads."

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