

# ICONIC HAMMERJACKS HITS THE STAGE AGAIN

## Bringing New Life to Baltimore's Entertainment District

by Brie E. Bennett



(Left to right): Bryan Adgate, Senior Preconstruction Manager, Morgan-Keller Construction; Kevin Butler, Owner, Hammerjacks Entertainment Group; and Matt Herbert, Principal at Design Collective Inc. at the new Hammerjacks venue site.

If you think about the music you grew up listening to, you may find that your thoughts transport you back in time as images of the good old days flood your mind. Music and memories go hand in hand according to an article published in 2009 by the University of California, Davis titled "Study Finds Brain Hub That Links Music, Memory and Emotion." In it, Associate Professor of Psychology Petr Janata is quoted as saying: "What seems to happen is that a piece of familiar music serves as a soundtrack for a mental movie that starts playing in our head. It calls back memories of a particular person or place."

For Kevin Butler, Owner of Hammerjacks Entertainment Group, the music he says accompanies his memories is old-school rock 'n' roll, the soulful backdrop for many of the memories he has of Hammerjacks, which used to be a well-known nightclub in the 1980s and 1990s, located in Baltimore.

COURTESY OF STEVE RUARK

Hammerjacks was a place where big hair and big-name rock 'n' roll and heavy metal bands were common sights. "Some of the bigger acts that would play in the local arenas would come in a day early just to hang out at Hammerjacks," Kevin recalls. Bands that wanted to show their fans appreciation or take advantage of a more intimate setting would often perform on the Hammerjacks stage prior to their big concerts, he adds. In November 1990, the band Poison made headlines in the local paper for giving away free tickets to an impromptu appearance at the venue. "It became an iconic place to play and also to hang out and watch bands," says Kevin.

Although the club eventually closed down, the brand still retained its renown. After purchasing the trademark in 2010, Kevin began selling Hammerjacks merchandise online and found the name brought fond

memories for many others who shared his love for the music and the melting pot of people and personalities that the club embodied. So, the following year he assembled a team of people to bring new life to the Hammerjacks moniker.

Revitalizing the brand means more than just putting the Hammerjacks name on a building; it requires the type of place that invites people to reminisce about the past, celebrate the present and look to the future. Knowing this, Kevin engaged Baltimore-based Design Collective Inc., a multi-disciplinary firm specializing in architecture, planning, interiors, landscape architecture and graphics, to design the appropriate environment for this monumental project. He also selected Morgan-Keller Construction as the general contractor and construction management firm that will bring those design plans to life.

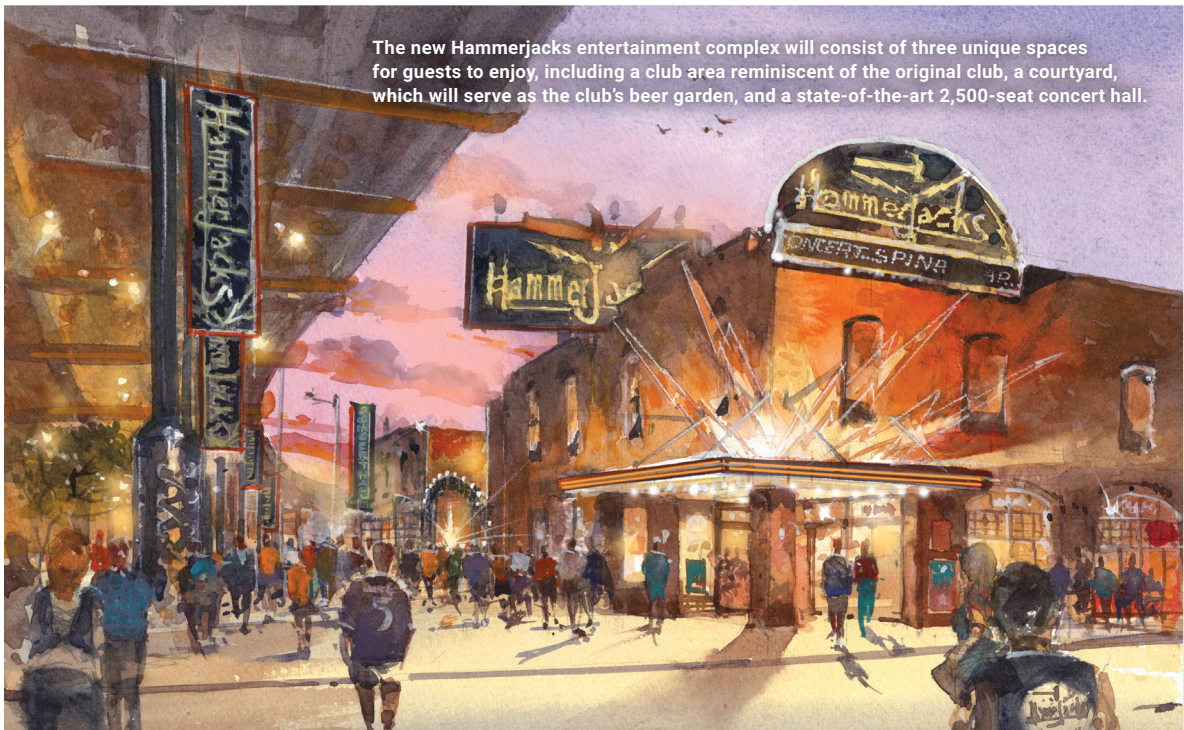
## RESTORING HISTORY BY MIXING OLD AND NEW

Matt Herbert, Principal at Design Collective, grew up in Baltimore and is familiar with the massive following the Hammerjacks brand garnered during its prime.

Understanding the landmark's history was necessary to incorporate its original essence into the new design plan. "You have to know the history. You have to respect it and appreciate it because if you don't the product will not feel authentic," Matt explains.

The original Hammerjacks nightclub was a brick warehouse building located in what is now a parking lot for the Baltimore Ravens football stadium. The new location, just blocks away from its birthplace, will be a combination of old and new. "There is the old Paradox facility,

The new Hammerjacks entertainment complex will consist of three unique spaces for guests to enjoy, including a club area reminiscent of the original club, a courtyard, which will serve as the club's beer garden, and a state-of-the-art 2,500-seat concert hall.







The design team from Design Collective Inc. reviews project plans together.

which is actually going to come down and a quarter portion that will be renovated as the club's side," says Matt.

He adds that the venue represents Baltimore's blue collar heritage of working hard and playing hard. "We are preserving the masonry of the existing buildings to celebrate the character of Baltimore as a brick city, from its warehouses to its row houses," says Matt. He additionally notes that his team is reusing wood from the original building to create rooflines similar to those of the first club.

## MANAGING THE PROCESS

Bryan Adgate is a Senior Preconstruction Manager at Morgan-Keller Construction. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering from the University of Maryland. During college he was a full-time intern with the National Association of Home Builders, serving as a research technician who managed construction processes for "test" homes in the local community; he also worked part-time as a carpenter for a small residential contractor in southern Maryland.

After college, in 2003, he began his professional career at Morgan-Keller Construction as an Estimator and Assistant Project Manager. The firm has over 60 years of experience working on a diverse portfolio of projects in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Today, this LEED-certified professional has a special appreciation for how designs can incorporate existing structures

within new buildings. "Sometimes it's a bit more difficult to try to incorporate and reuse materials, but it's a sounder, greener way to approach any project," notes Bryan.

With hands-on field experience in construction early in his career, as well as a carpentry background, Bryan has a unique appreciation for all of the different tradespeople who have come together on this job. "Spending some time in the field to understand what it takes for all the different trades to come together is an absolute necessity for anyone who is going to get into construction management," he says.

Bryan serves as the primary point of contact on the project, leading the design team and working hand-in-hand with the developer, overseeing the budget and guiding approval processes—ultimately taking the project from concept to groundbreaking.

He is also a Maryland native familiar with the area's legacy. Like Kevin, he grew up listening to the music of Hammerjacks' star performers, and is excited to be involved in the landmark's rebirth. "Everyone on the project has a personal vested interest in it. When you've got those types of personal feelings, it's more than just a job," Bryan shares.

## NOT SINGING THE SAME OLD SONG

This new multilevel complex will consist of three distinct, yet cohesive, spaces. The club side will contain a bar and a small stage, reminiscent of the original venue. A

**“We’re very proud to be able to not only breathe life into old structures, but to breathe development, economic impact and vitality into the community as a whole.”**

**-Matt Herbert, Principal,  
Design Collective Inc.**

courtyard—where guests can socialize outdoors in a beer garden and enjoy the atmosphere and refreshments before and after events—will connect the building to a third space, a concert hall.

The 2,500-seat concert hall will retain Hammerjacks’ historical vibe with a pit in the middle. This depressed center area will be reserved for general admission standing-room ticketholders. But instead of the venue being laid out as a wide-open space like the original Hammerjacks, there will be separate VIP areas and a large mezzanine that wraps around three sides of the stage.

Also new and unique to this building’s design are materials and finishes chosen to mitigate the impact of vibration and noise resulting from the surroundings. Architects were tasked with the challenge of ensuring that acoustics are not compromised by external sounds from a nearby overpass and railhead.

The developer adds that while the first-generation Hammerjacks was known as a rocker’s paradise, this new entertainment center will be rock-centric with blues, country and all types of other musical offerings. “I don’t want it to be defined by just one type of genre. Hammerjacks is

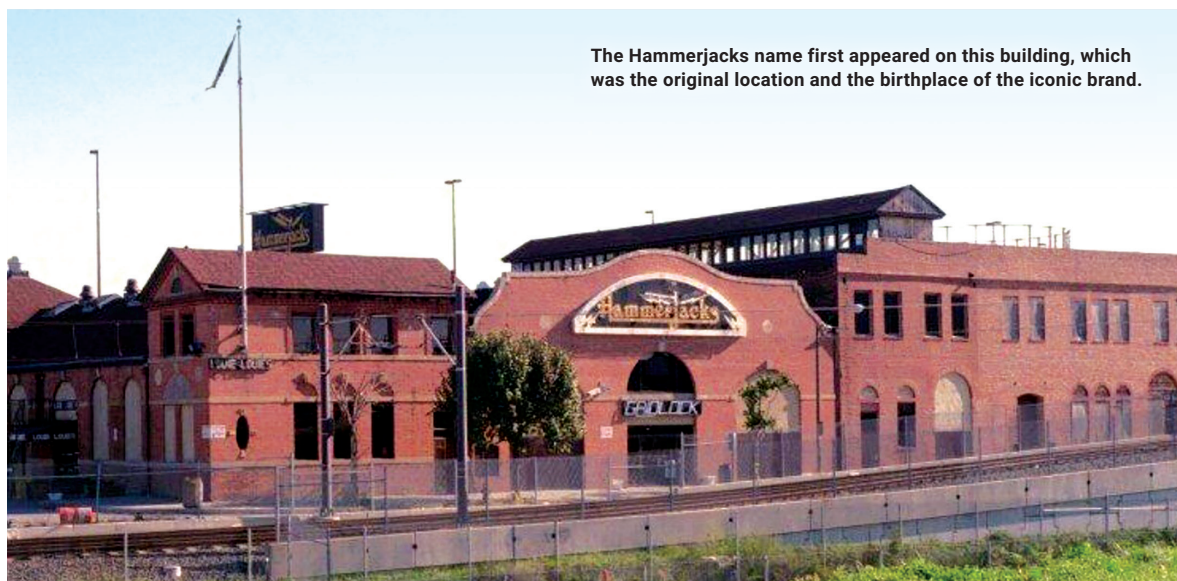
going to have something for everyone,” Kevin says.

What does it mean to be a part of revitalizing a legacy? “We’re very proud to be able to not only breathe life into old structures, but to breathe development, economic impact and vitality into the community as a whole. So for us, these are ideal projects,” says Matt.

Kevin anticipates that the new Hammerjacks will become a destination within a destination. “I believe that within the next five years, Baltimore’s entertainment district and the Carroll-Camden industrial area are going to be filled with bars, restaurants, stadiums, a casino—and Hammerjacks,” he predicts.

With the music, the people and soon this extraordinary entertainment complex, the Hammerjacks legacy will undoubtedly create new memories for years to come. 🐼

*Author Bio: Brie E. Bennett is a contributing author located in Dallas, Texas.*



The Hammerjacks name first appeared on this building, which was the original location and the birthplace of the iconic brand.