

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Champion of the beautiful

Nobel laureate Gunter Blobel died last week in Manhattan. Blobel's discoveries in cell biology greatly advanced medical researchers' understanding of numerous diseases from



Commentary by
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Alzheimers to AIDS to many forms of cancer.

From a Pottstown perspective, however, Blobel's efforts to restore humanity's shared architectural heritage are also impressive.

As a boy, Blobel lived in eastern Germany during the Nazi era. When his family fled west by car from advancing Russian troops in early 1945, 8-year-old Blobel passed through Dresden and was awe-struck by the beauty of its baroque and rococo buildings.

Days later, Blobel "saw from a distance of about 30 kilometers a fire-lit, red night sky reflecting the raging firestorm that destroyed this great jewel of a city in one of the most catastrophic bombing attacks of World War II."



GUNTER BLOBEL

A five-square mile area encompassing Dresden's historic city center was re-

duced to rubble, including its landmark Frauenkirche, once Germany's most important Protestant church, featuring one of the largest domes in Europe.

After the war, Blobel earned his medical degree in Germany and emigrated to the United States. He joined the faculty of Rockefeller University in Manhattan, where he made his revolutionary discoveries in cell biology.

All his life, Blobel aspired to restore Dresden's magnificent architecture, particularly the Frauenkirche, which had been left in ruins as a war memorial in the heart of the city.

Meanwhile, the reunification of Germany in 1990 strengthened efforts to rebuild the Frauenkirche and other significant Dresden buildings.

In 1994, Blobel founded the Friends of Dresden to help renovate and rebuild some of the structures the city lost in the war. He donated all \$960,000 of his Nobel stipend toward rebuilding the Frauenkirche and a synagogue destroyed by the Kristallnacht attack on German Jews.

After more than 10 years of restoration work, the Frauenkirche was consecrated in September 2005, witnessed by a host of dignitaries including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Duke of Kent, a patron of the Dresden Trust, a British group that raised more than \$1 million toward the \$218 million needed to restore the church.

Significantly, most of the restoration funds were privately raised.

Said one German historian, "I think that it is a good thing that Germans, wherever possible, regain part of their old cities, so that they know they came from somewhere."

Here in Pottstown, we've never lost any buildings to bombing, but we've lost numerous architectural gems to expediency.

But as Gunter Blobel and the many friends of Dresden demonstrate, it's never too late to preserve — and sometimes even to rebuild — our architectural heritage.



FRAUENKIRCHE, built 1726-1743. Destroyed 1945. Rebuilt 1994-2005.