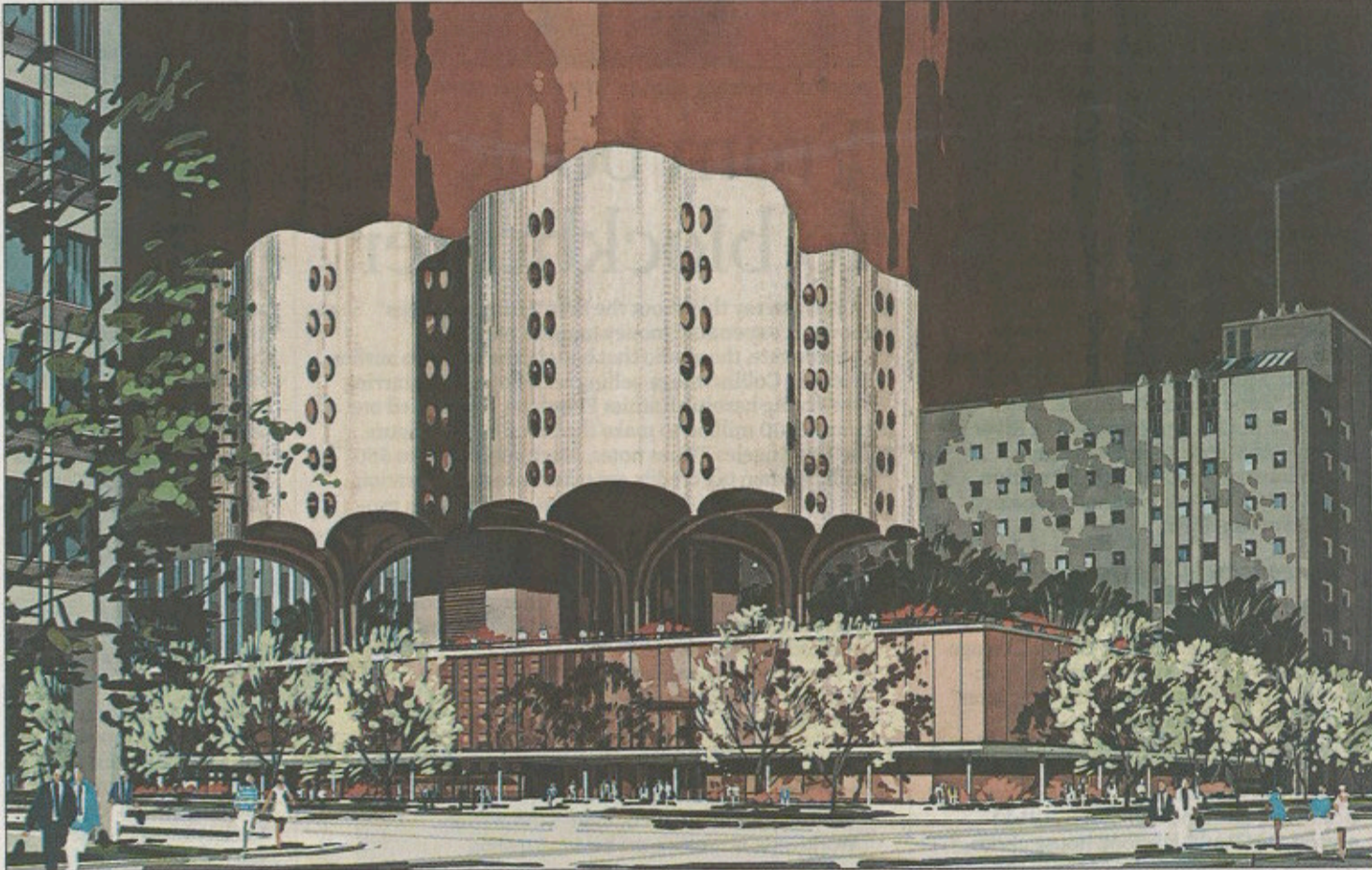


Chicago Tribune
A+E
 ARTS+ENTERTAINMENT



A Bertrand Goldberg exhibit at the Art Institute makes a tacit case for preserving his Prentice Women's Hospital, shown in an early rendering.

FOCUS BERTRAND GOLDBERG

Beyond the corncobs

New exhibition explores complete body of work by Marina City architect



BLAIR KAMIN
Tribune architecture critic

In architectural circles at least, a certain tension has long surrounded the work of Bertrand Goldberg, the architect of Chicago's iconic Marina City towers.

Was Goldberg a master of exuberant expressionism or a Johnny One Note who couldn't let go of his signature circle shapes? Did his designs liberate their users from the tyranny of the steel-and-glass box or introduce a new tyranny? Does Goldberg, who died in 1997, deserve a more prominent place in the broad history of late modern architecture, or will posterity view him as a mere idiosyncratic exception to the mainstream currents of his time?

A major new retrospective

exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, opening Saturday, goes a long way toward giving us a more complex view of Goldberg's career than his simple association with Marina City's corncobs — and settling most of the aforementioned issues in the architect's favor.

The scholarly exhibition also packs populist appeal, displaying such fascinating early Goldberg work as a futuristic, mast-supported gas station in Chicago. The show is timely, too, putting the simmering controversy over Northwestern University's plans to tear down Goldberg's old Prentice Women's Hospital into historical perspective, one that tacitly suggests that destroying the building would be a major loss.

Titled "Bertrand Goldberg: Architecture of Invention" and featuring more than 100 drawings, models and photographs, the show, like its subject, is daringly unconventional.

Instead of a standard chrono-

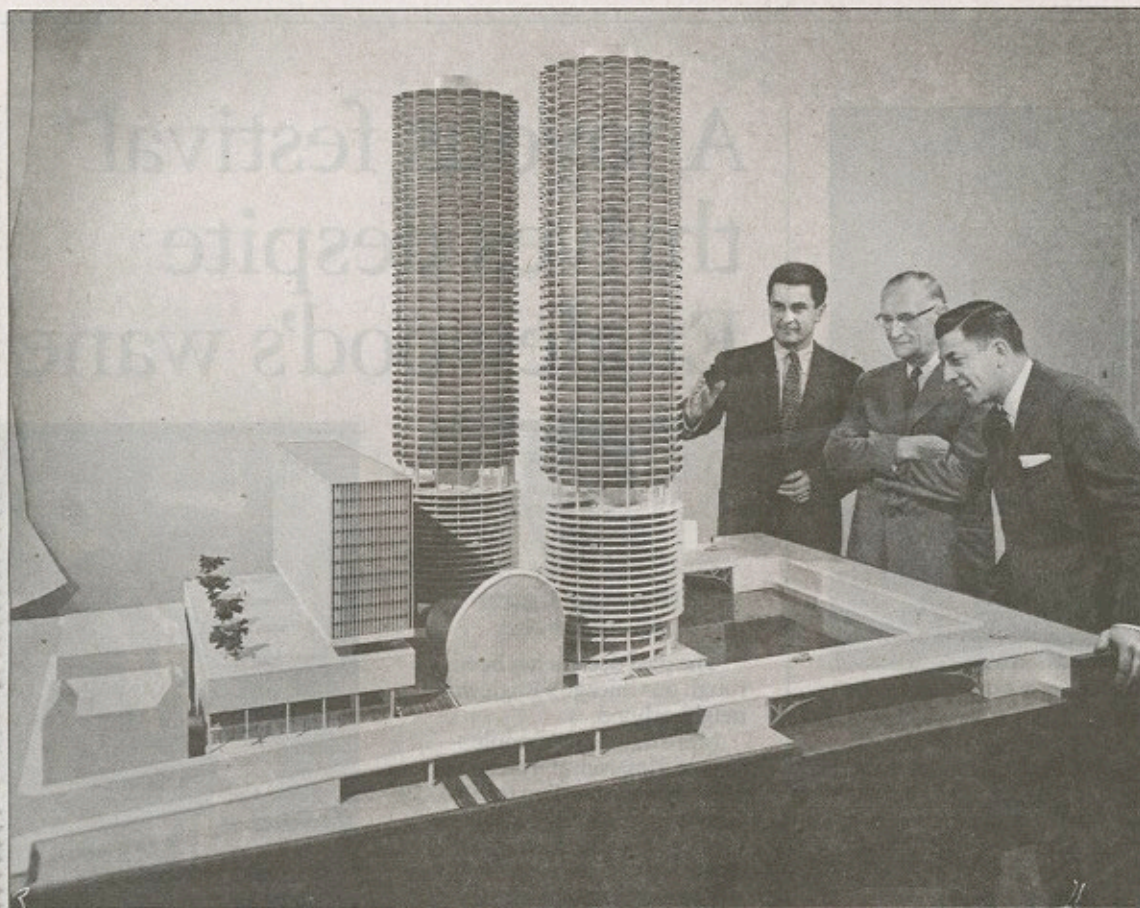
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The exhibit shows that Goldberg not only designed Marina City, but shrewdly marketed it as well.

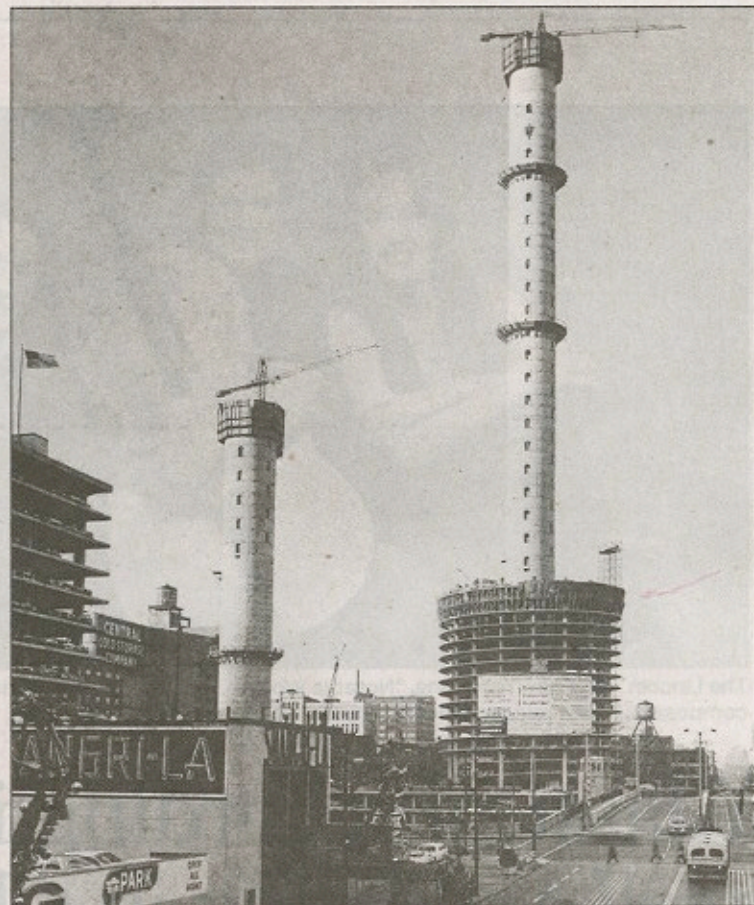
A new page added to the Chicago Tribune A+E report

FOCUS **BERTRAND GOLDBERG**



CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM

Architect Bertrand Goldberg, left, with the model of his Marina City design, circa 1960. A new Art Institute exhibit delivers fresh perspectives about the great "city in a city."



TRIBUNE PHOTO

Construction of Marina City in 1962. By working backward in time, the exhibit shows the origins of the inventiveness of Goldberg's towers.

Looking past the corncocks

Continued from Page 1

logical order, the exhibit starts with Goldberg's mature years, then moves to his early experimental work. The show's trio of curators — the museum's curator of architecture and design, Zoe Ryan; its assistant architecture curator, Alison Fisher; and guest curator Elizabeth Smith — are betting that the arrangement will hook museumgoers whose familiarity with Goldberg is limited to Marina City. And there is reason to think they're right.

As shaped by Chicago architect John Ronan, the exhibition design nicely reinforces the show's reverse progression, moving from pie-shaped galleries that pay homage to Goldberg's floor plans to right-angled galleries that symbolize his training in Germany's Bauhaus. A Chicago native who grew up in Hyde Park and attended Harvard, Goldberg briefly worked at the Berlin office of Bauhaus master Ludwig Mies van der Rohe before opening his own practice in Chicago in 1937.

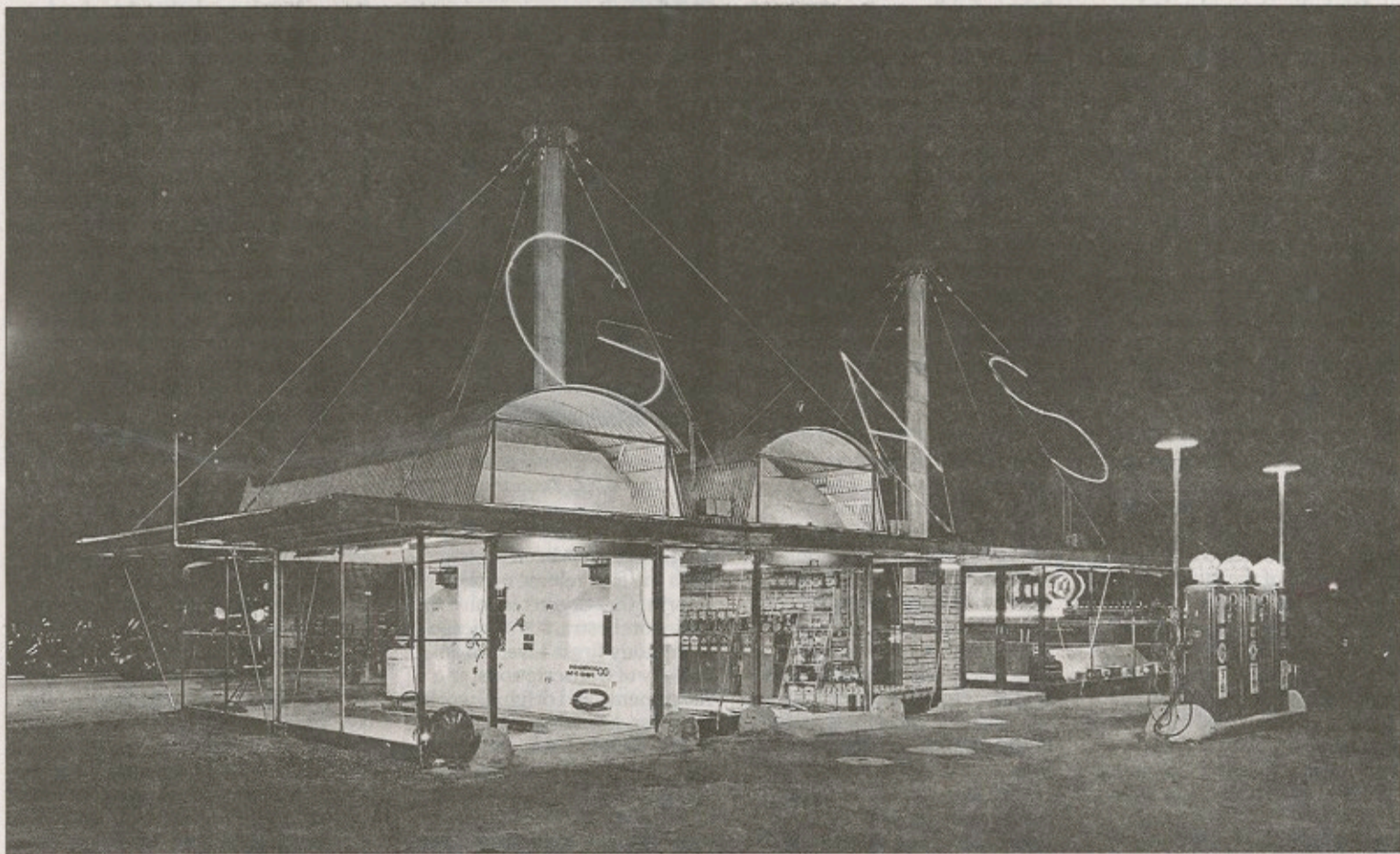
The show starts weakly; its title is displayed on a flimsy-looking wall of concrete that unsuccessfully evokes Goldberg's muscular use of the material. But it quickly recovers, delivering fresh perspectives about Marina City, the great "city in a city" whose design responded to the pervasive, late 1950s trend of middle-class families fleeing Chicago for the suburbs.

Goldberg, we learn, didn't just design the complex. He shrewdly marketed it, building full-scale mock-ups of two apartments and even commissioning a photographer to shoot what would be the views from the 40th floor. He also persuaded federal officials to back a mortgage for Marina City, lobbying for the government's definition of "family housing" to include couples without young children. Drawings from the museum's extensive Goldberg archive show the evolution of key aspects of the design, such as the diamond-shaped columns that flare so gracefully into the towers' balconies.

It's equally instructive to view examples of Goldberg's unrealized work, such as a large-scale model of the eye-grabbing New York skyscraper he designed for the American Broadcasting Co. in the 1960s after Marina City's success. An illuminated broadcast tower, taller than the Empire State Building, would have risen alongside the undulating concrete high-rise. But financially strapped ABC killed the project. Writing in the show's informative catalog, curator Smith speculates that Goldberg's place in the pantheon of late modernism might have been secured by the building of this corporate headquarters and an equally high-profile project, a theater in San Diego.

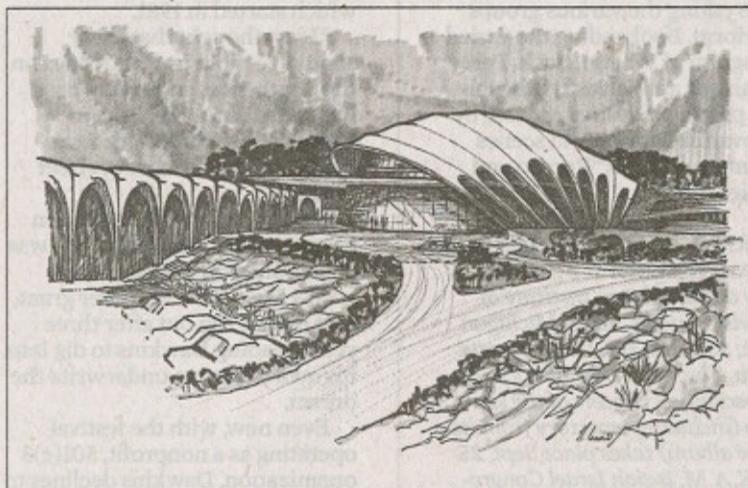
Instead, Goldberg focused on less sexy building types — housing and hospitals.

The show illustrates the humanity of Goldberg's vision for the former, evident in the chess tables and picnic areas that dot a landscape plan for his Raymond Hilliard public housing complex in Chicago. We also see how the vibrancy of Marina City's "city within a city" formula ran amok

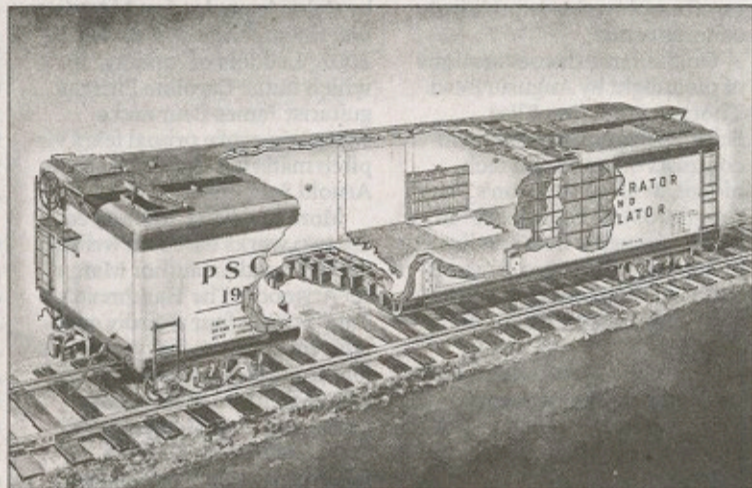


CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM

One of Goldberg's early works, designed in 1938 with Gilmer V. Black, was a Chicago service station. A year earlier, Goldberg had opened his Chicago practice after working for Mies van der Rohe in Berlin.



The exhibit features more than 100 models, photos and drawings, including a drawing of a San Diego theater Goldberg designed in 1967-68.



A cutaway view of a freight car design, 1949-52, helps illustrate Goldberg's range. He also designed hospitals, small shops and furnishings.

in the architect's over-dense, early 1970s plan for River City. It called for nine clusters of three-legged towers, each 72 stories tall, along the Chicago River's South Branch. After considerable reworking, only a serpentine fragment of the vast, mixed-use complex was built.

In contrast, Goldberg finished hospitals from Mobile, Ala., to Tacoma, Wash., and the curators raise the level of debate about Old Prentice's future by including the threatened hospital in a mix of models and drawings about these buildings. A section titled "Goldberg Variations" documents how they typically consisted of a curvilinear bed tower atop a rectilinear base building. Old Prentice, completed in 1975, took the formula to new levels of plasticity. Its four-lobed concrete bed towers, which soar outward from the building's core, simultaneously reduced the need for structural columns in the base building and created village-like clusters of nursing stations and patient rooms above.

(A spokesman for the city's Department of Housing and Economic Development said

Tuesday that the building is "in a holding pattern," and that discussions about its future are ongoing. In June, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks postponed a vote to decide whether the building should be a landmark.)

Far from seeming out of order, the subsequent sections of the show, which chronicle Goldberg's early years, draw strength from their unusual placement.

The inventiveness that would blossom in Marina City is evident in the mast-supported, Depression-era gas station in Chicago (now demolished) and another mast structure, a portable ice cream store in River Forest combining elements of a building and a trailer. Other projects prefigure Marina City's engagement with the water and its provision of leisure activities. A variety of examples, from a 1939 plywood chair to a 1952 plan for an unbuilt Gold Coast apartment building, trace Goldberg's affinity for curvilinear forms. A suavely curving chromed chair and other furniture designs reveal how he worked at a variety of scales.

To be sure, the show has weaknesses. The curators sometimes leave viewers in the dark, either omitting wall text for key projects or providing incomplete accounts of a project's history. The engineering techniques that made Goldberg's designs possible aren't always explained fully. And the show's heavy reliance on drawings could leave some nonarchitects at a loss to understand what they're looking at.

Still, most of the drawings are easy enough to grasp and they're a visual pleasure, their strokes of graphite, colored pencil and ink showing how architects did things in the pre-digital era. But Goldberg's buildings are anything but out-of-date relics. While his body of work can't match the breadth and quality of such late modern masters such as Eero Saarinen, his body of ideas, most notably his belief that architecture should act in the service of inviting people to form communities, remains as relevant as ever.

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Bertrand Goldberg: Architecture of Invention

When: Saturday-Jan. 15

Where: Art Institute of Chicago, galleries 283-285, 111 S. Michigan Ave.

Tickets: Free with \$18 admission to the museum. The show is accompanied by a photography exhibition, "Inside Marina City: A Project by Iker Gil and Andreas E.G. Larson," that explores the inside of apartments at Marina City. A third show, "Bertrand Goldberg: Reflections," on view at the Arts Club of Chicago Friday through Jan. 13, provides an intimate look at the architect, offering a glimpse of his personal collection of art and artifacts, along with his designs for furniture and jewelry. The club is at 201 E. Ontario St.