

# Throw Wide the Doors: Open Doors RI gives locals a different view of their own state

Let's face it: Central Falls and Pawtucket don't get the respect they deserve. Many know of them, but know little about them. This September, we have an opportunity to change that through Open Doors RI. The two cities will be on showcase for a day, providing a glimpse into centuries of industry and the ensuing architectural wonder, all for the low, low cost of just showing up.

Caroline Stevens, director of Open Doors RI, shed some light on the goings-on planned for the curious and adventurous among us. Her pep and passion for history is contagious. Back in 2017, she helped put on Open Doors Providence, which saw 4,000 visitors enter 24 sites normally closed to the public. Now Pawtucket and Central Falls, two cities with histories just as rich as the capital, will have their chance to shine, thanks in no small part to her diligence.

Stevens admits freely that part of her motivation for organizing such events is selfish. How else could she have gained entry into such a variety of historical oddities? That's the thing about living somewhere so old and so small — nearly every inch of our state is saturated in history. The sheer variety of sites is sure to include something for those of all interests, whether it's McCoy Stadium (get it while you can) or sitting behind the desk of Pawtucket's Mayor Don Grebien. When you're in such a place, you can feel the thread that holds these cities together, especially as that thread is plucked and pulled by our state's evolution.

"What happened here? What could happen here in the future?" Stevens suggested as a good line of thought to hold while exploring each site. Many of the buildings on display have gone through iterations of agrarian centuries, decades of industrial boom and repurposed futures. One such example is the Kalon Club, a former social hotspot for the bourgeois that's been converted into an archaeological lab. Living history like this is what Stevens described as "magical."

Visitors will be able to peruse about 10 sites across the two cities. Full hours and site locations are available at Open Doors RI's website, [doorsopenri.org](http://doorsopenri.org). With a little planning, you should be able to hit a bunch and chat with the volunteers who will be stationed at each site. Organizers hope festival-goers will be inspired by the scavenger hunt or simply by the spirit of connection the event creates and stick around to explore the cities.

"You're seeing the city in more color," Stevens said. "It makes you feel more socially connected. That's the whole idea of the program. Once you've been inside of these places and you notice these things, you develop a connection to them. Then you can become and advocate of the place, an ambassador."

Connections to the community are vital to this endeavor. Marta Martinez, the director of Rhode Island Latino Arts, will be helping to bridge visitors from Pawtucket into Central Falls, the teeniest Rhode Island municipality that is often overlooked. Festival organizers hope that people from all over Rhode Island will pay a visit to Central Falls and its open doors, and that residents of the city will come out and see things they may not have known where there, such as Cogswell Tower, an imposing stone clock tower built by the wife of a teetotaling dentist during King Phillip's War.

History lives before the eyes of visitors in the vacant and shabby (not Stevens' words, she insisted I mention) former industrial site at 238 Main Street in Pawtucket. Urban renewal's torrent of tearing down the old and beautiful left a massive steel wall hanging over an abandoned building in the center of Pawtucket. But did you know a gorgeous, glimmering dome survived, hidden away inside? Go see it sometime, maybe September 28, between 10am and 4pm.

*Open Doors RI's Pawtucket and Central Falls event takes place on Sep 28 at multiple locations from 10am - 4pm. For information, [doorsopenri.org](http://doorsopenri.org)*