

# 500 Central Avenue

An Adaptive Reuse Story

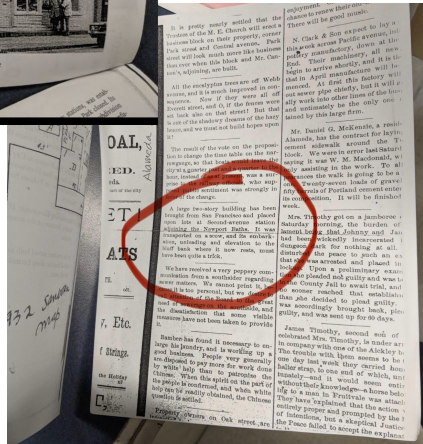
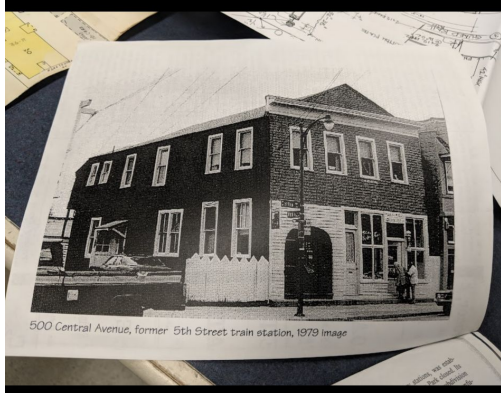
Historical Advisory Board  
March 5, 2026  
Presented by Claire  
Slattery · Founder + Creator  
of Improv Central



# A Building That Crossed the Bay

Est. 1880s

In March 1886, the Alameda Argus reported that a large two-story building had been transported by scow from San Francisco and placed on lots in what would become the Fifth Street Station neighborhood. This building literally floated across the Bay – and it has been part of Alameda ever since. By 1979, it was photographed as the former Fifth Street train station – a neighborhood landmark quietly holding its history.



# Fifth Street Station



Fifth Street Station, looking east on Central Avenue, 1993. Left to right: commercial addition, 504-506 Central Ave. (1919); Kaney Building, 500 Central Ave. (moved to site, 1886); Suelflohn Building, 478 Central Ave. (1915). (Photo by Mark Koehler.)

fronts of houses on the north side of Central Avenue, two fine buildings went in on the south side of the street, and two gas stations were erected at the corner of Ninth and Central. In spite of subsequent remodelings, Caroline retains much of its original feeling. Nine prewar buildings and additions still stand, including the Dwinelle Building.

## Fifth Street Station

Opened around 1885 after the station at Sixth Street closed, Fifth Street Station was bordered on the west by bathing resorts as late as the 1940s. The business district has always been tiny. The oldest building, 500 Central Ave., was brought across the bay by barge in 1886. The two-story building next door (478 Central Ave.) was built in 1915 by Gustave H. Suelflohn, a contractor whose offices were located at Fifth Street Station for many years. The station's appearance has changed little since the 1920s. The adjoining buildings at 478 and 500 Central Ave. are its most important resources, together forming an evocative image of Alameda's historic station districts.

*Taking Care of Business, Woodruff minor*

# Fifth Street Station



Southern Pacific  
Goes Electric

# What a 140-Year-Old Building Teaches You

Historic buildings keep you humble – and keep you improvising



No right angles

Nothing meets at 90°. Every door frame, every wall has its own geometry after 140 years.



The building leans

The structure has settled – beautifully, imperfectly – over a century and a half.



Two leak discoveries

Found one active leak – and caught a second threatening to become a much bigger issue. Just in time.



Wildly uneven floors

What looks flat isn't. What looks level definitely isn't. We adapted at every turn.

***“The building asked us to improvise at every turn.”***



BEFORE



# City of Alameda Façade Grant Program

50/50 matching grant for eligible facade improvements. Improv Central applied, was awarded, and used every dollar.

## What the grant funded:

- ◆ Custom backlit channel letter sign
- ◆ Custom metalwork
- ◆ Exterior refurbishment
- ◆ Exterior painting
- ◆ Gooseneck exterior lights
- ◆ Exterior sconce lighting

50/50 Grant – \$7,241 Initially awarded then the façade grant committee voted to increase our grant to \$8,202 to account for the unanticipated cost increases



*"The 'after' image really shows how you brought the building to life, great job!" — Jackie Keliiaa, City of Alameda (Featured in City Council report)*

Before



After



Remember these before photos?





NOW



Sept 13, 2025: Our Grand Opening & Ribbon Cutting ceremony event with Councilmember Boller

# Improv Central

*Alameda's first community space where real-life improvisers gather in-person to build the courage and confidence to navigate our unscripted lives together.*

*"You're already a real-life improviser – because real life is improvised."*



Open since September 2025 · 500 Central Avenue, Alameda · [improv-central.com](http://improv-central.com)

# Improv Central



## CONNECT

For folks and families who want more ease, play, and community in their everyday lives.

**Classes include:** Improvised Connection, Friday Connect, Family Frolic (kids 4+ welcome), and monthly Guest Pop-Ups.

Feel more present, playful, and connected – no small talk required.

# Improv Central

## CAREER

For folks who want to speak more confidently at work — or simply feel more like themselves in their chosen careers.

**Classes include:** Playful Public Speaking, More Speaking, Less Cringe (for Teens), and Corporate workshops, Leadership Coaching, and Team Training also available.

Show up in meetings, lead with authenticity, navigate uncertainty without a script.

# Improv Central



For folks who want to explore foundational improv skills — scene work, characters, storytelling — without the pressure to perform.

**Classes include:** The Craft of Improv and special guest workshops with the likes of Jeff Raz, Christina Lewis, and more

No stage. No audience. No performance required.

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**Drop in for \$35 · Memberships  
available · All experience levels  
welcome**

**500 Central Ave, Alameda · [improv-central.com](http://improv-central.com)**

# Thank You



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