

HOOD RIVER LODGE 1507

Neon revival is just one part of extensive repairs at Elks

■ By Kirby Neumann-Rea
Columbia Gorge News

AN ICONIC BEACON IS revived at the corner of Cascade and Third streets in Hood River, at Elks Lodge 1507.

The lodge's 60-year-old neon sign is back on line in all its blue-and-yellow glory, and there is new power behind the 11 O'Clock Elk image.

Yet the sign restoration is just one element in the biggest set of repairs and upgrades ever done at the building, according to Exalted Ruler Derek Larson.

"The building is virtually empty, so it's been a good time to do it," said Larson of the building repairs. "With the COVID-19 orders we couldn't open or do business as a club, but the officers and I knew that this was a chance to do some updates."

One of the main projects is a complete remodeling of the bar and lounge.

"It's decades of work that was long overdue," Larsen said

Elks members believe the neon system went dark at around 20 years ago. Larsen

said lodge veterans are unsure how long it had been since the vivid blue tubes and distinctive Elks clock symbol were illuminated.

In mid-December, Neon Gods of Portland got the Elks sign fully operational again. Plenty of other activity is happening to renew the downtown anchor building where, perhaps coincidentally, a 12-foot mystery monolith appeared in the parking lot last week (see photo).

In addition to the sign upgrade and bar redo, projects have included placing four inches of insulation in the roof, where no insulation had been, repairing or replacing windows throughout the facility, and upgrades to the patio and the front of the building, including ongoing repairs to the portico over the main entrance on Cascade Avenue.

"There was substantial rot, so it was good to do it now," Larsen said. "With the building closed, we knew we wanted to let members know that their dues are being put to good use."

The changes are either inside or not obvious, with the exception of the sign. Work to get it lit again started



in November, and took several visits by the sign repair experts to restore the brightness, though Neon Gods' owner Michael Mintz said he is monitoring it after one or two sections proved stubborn.

"It was a fun challenge to patch the sign back together," Mintz said. Neon Gods' work has included other Elks facilities and the historic Aladdin and Laurelhurst theaters in Portland. Mintz and Kyle Lembke replaced most of the sign's neon system, where a set of transformers had long-since stopped working.

Larsen said that last year he found a weathered hand-written sign reading

"this doesn't work" sign inside the electrical box serving the sign.

It does now.

The Elk image and faux clock face has a new LED system, designed and installed by Lembke. The clock perennially reads 11 o'clock.

"The hour of eleven has a tender significance," according to Elks.org. "Whatever his lot in life may be, When this hour fall upon the dial of night the great heart of Elklom swells and throbs. It is the golden hour of recollection, the homecoming of those who wander, the mystic call of those who will come no more."



Michael Mintz, left, and Kyle Lembke repair the neon in the Hood River Elks Lodge, in November photo at top right. Mintz and Lembke of Portland's Neon Gods made several trips to Hood River to repair, replace and reconnect the tubes and operation of the 1940s sign, Kirby Neumann-Rea photos
Submitted photos

Jordan McHale, at right, and Sean Bohince, inside, of Botech in Hood River, install new windows on the main floor of Elks, one of number of structural upgrades to the building.

Kirby Neumann-Rea photos
Michael Mintz photo at right

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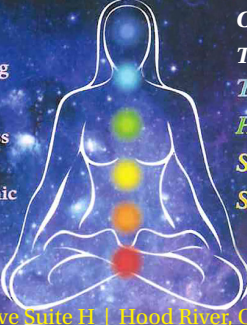
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