



PHOTO BY KYLE LYNCH-KLARUP

FROM THE ASHES

Civic Stadium's grandstand has burned, but the game isn't over yet BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

“**S**he deserved a better ending,” Bev Smith said, standing not far from the still-smoldering remains of Civic Stadium’s once towering grandstand.

Smith is the executive director of Kidsports and part of Eugene Civic Alliance, the group that came together to save and restore Eugene’s historic 1938 wooden baseball stadium. Part of the plans for Civic involved building a new Kidsports fieldhouse, where kids could play basketball and other indoor sports, and preserving the grandstand for fans to watch Lane United and Azul play soccer on the field and where children could play sports outdoors.

While mourning the loss of a structure where so many Eugeneans built memories over the years and that was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the members of the Eugene Civic Alliance have started to focus on the future.

Now, Smith said, it’s time to find a way to honor those memories and create something even more beautiful.

The note that 7-year old Leo Rickard left on the doorstep of Friends of Civic Stadium board member Jim Watson the night of the fire is emblematic of the focus on the future and the hope for what will rise from the burned wood.

Earlier this year Leo asked friends to give money to save the stadium instead of giving him birthday gifts. Speaking at a press conference the day after the fire, which drew media from all over the state, Eugene City Councilor George Brown said when the dream of restoring the stadium turned to ashes at 5:30 pm June 29, Leo gathered together bills and a coin and scotch-taped them to a note

that said, “I’m so sorry that Civic Stadium burned. Let’s rebuild.”

Civic Alliance member Derek Johnson said Civic “was made from what this town was built on” — old-growth Douglas fir — and that it is hard to put into words how it felt to watch it burn and how much it was a part of the fabric of this community. He said the Civic Alliance is making plans to see if any of the remaining timber can be re-milled as a part of new structure built to honor Civic “as it stood, until yesterday.”

“This is not a structure that can be replaced,” Johnson said, but giving a nod to the old stadium with a new structure, “would make us all feel better, would make the community feel better.”

The Civic Alliance said that as owners of the property they will pay for any post-fire cleanup and if local, state or federal aid arose, they would welcome it.

The Eugene Civic Alliance raised more than \$4 million from private donors to purchase and save the ballpark and its land. The structure itself was insured for \$3 million, the Civic Alliance said. Now, they said instead of fundraising and spending the next five to seven years fundraising and restoring the grandstand, the focus is on fundraising and building a new structure, as well as the planned fieldhouse and playing fields for the area’s children and burgeoning men’s and women’s soccer teams.

The burning of Civic Stadium created an outpouring of memories of watching games at the former home of the Emeralds baseball team. Both at the Civic site and on social media people lamented the stadium’s sudden loss. One of the many onlookers at the swift and raging fire said

sadly, “Well, there goes my childhood.” The old stadium struck a chord with people — its demise made headlines across the country.

While many Eugeneans grieve the loss of the old ballpark, others saw it as an eyesore and were not interested in its restoration. The question now arises if those who mourn the grandstand will donate to its rebuilding and if those who were less enamored of the Works Progress Administration-built grandstand stand will donate to something new.

With the loss of the grandstand, the layout of where the fieldhouse could be placed and where a new grandstand could go has now changed. With the exception of a half-acre pocket park owned by the city of Eugene, and a corner that protrudes from the 10.2 acres that was purchased by stadium supporter and Market of Choice owner Rick Wright and two other investors, the majority of land is more or less a blank slate.

As baseball cultural icon Yogi Berra once said, “It’s not over till it’s over.”

Eugene Springfield Fire Operations Deputy Chief Joe Zaludek said no one was injured in the fire or fighting in, which he called “amazing” for an incident of this magnitude. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Several witnesses reported seeing three to four youths in the press box, where some say they saw the fire begin and also three to four young people were seen leaving the stadium via the pedestrian overpass over Amazon Parkway.

Eugene police have a phone tip line: (541) 682-8888 and an email tip line at crimetips@ci.eugene.or.us and seek videos and photos from the public. ■

Editor’s Note: EW co-owner Art Johnson is a member of Eugene Civic Alliance, Derek Johnson is his son.