

Bricks \$ Mortar

SHUTTERED HEALTH CLUB SHOWS NO SIGN OF LIFE

Photo by Christian Wihtol

Gutting may be in store for former Elements location in west Eugene

BY CHRISTIAN WIHTOL

Two years ago, gym members were unpleasantly surprised when the owners of the Elements Health Club at 4242 Commerce Street in west Eugene abruptly shut the place.

Today, the once-bustling building remains closed, and it seems unlikely a new fitness center will open there soon, if ever.

The 36,000-square-foot two-story building is among the largest empty commercial spaces in west Eugene.

The building is not prominent. Commerce Street is tucked off West 11th Avenue, two blocks east of the Beltline/West 11th intersection.

But the health club was long popular with west Eugene's fitness community. Built in 1979, the building always housed a health club — until the owners of Elements suddenly shut it in June 2023.

Since then, the building has changed hands. It's now owned by a company

headed by Steven Yett, a Eugene-based real estate investor and developer.

Yett's plan for the place is unglamorous: gutting it and turning it into office, warehouse or quasi-industrial space, according to paperwork reviewed by *Eugene Weekly*. But so far, Yett hasn't filed for permits to begin the work.

Yett didn't reply to an email and phone call from *Eugene Weekly*.

NEW JERSEY INVESTMENT

For many years, the building and its fitness club were owned and run by Eugene-area business people, records indicate. In 2018, they sold the building for \$4 million to a giant New Jersey-based real estate investment company, SCF RC Funding LLC, the sale deed shows. The New Jersey venture buys, owns and sells single-use commercial properties around the country. This particular investment proved a loser for the New Jersey firm, however.

It's unclear when Elements Health Club became the tenant operating the fitness center in the building. But in early 2023, with Elements apparently having signed a 20-year lease, the New Jersey investment trust put the building on the market for \$4.4 million, a real estate broker's listing shows.

No buyer materialized. Then in late

June 2023, Elements abruptly closed, to the dismay of members, according to news accounts at the time.

The New Jersey company continued to market the vacant building. But not until nearly a year later did a buyer emerge: Yett. He paid just \$1.4 million for the property in May 2024. The deal included treadmills, weight machines and other equipment that remains in the building today.

NO DEMAND

An appraisal Yett commissioned for the building earlier this year says there's no demand for a health club in that part of Eugene. Yett's aim is to turn the place into a "flex commercial building (warehouse and office/flex space)," the appraisal says. The work is estimated at \$1.5 million. It would include filling in the swimming pool (\$300,000); refurbishing the elevator (\$145,000), replacing the roof (\$200,000), demolishing interior walls, and installing new bathrooms, the appraisal says. There's also a potential \$20,000 tab to remove flooring tiles that contain asbestos.

With tilt-up concrete block walls and high ceilings, the building is structurally sound, according to the paperwork.

The New Jersey investment firm fared better with its other Lane County fitness club property, off Harlow Road in Springfield. The New Jersey company bought that building at the same time as it bought the Commerce Street building in 2018. And Elements closed the Springfield location, too, in June 2023. But another tenant, West Coast Strength, stepped in and remains there, and the New Jersey company remains the building owner.

Bricks \$ Mortar is a column anchored by Christian Wihtol, who worked as an editor and writer at The Register-Guard in Eugene 1990-2018, much of the time focused on real estate, economic development and business. Reach him at Christian@EugeneWeekly.com.



YONAH RIEL AT MECCA.
Photo by Seira Kitagawa

Eugene Message Makers gather at MECCA to support protest

BY SEIRA KITAGAWA

As President Donald Trump took over the White House on January 20, many Eugeneans and people across the nation started to stand up and join together, forming activist groups and hitting the streets. On the No

Kings Day protest June 14, approximately 10,000 people joined together marching through Eugene. Ongoing protests are taking place around town all week long, and people are marching, holding signs and meeting people with shared wishes.

You may wonder where those signs are coming from, or how people make them. Some signs are painted, printed or made using materials that stand out, such as flags and balloons.

Rogene Manas, a member of the Eugene Message Makers, spends her Wednesdays at a table at MECCA, Materials Exchange

Center For the Community Arts. Eugene Message Makers are a group of women volunteering to help people make signs for protests and activism. They provide free supplies including paints, brushes and paper for people coming in to make protest posters.

"Some of us can't necessarily go to protest because of health and other reasons," Manas says, "but we want to be part of it and support."

All the supplies are through donations. Manas says that some women in the group have special paper that work well for signs. She and her colleagues at Eugene Message Makers make signs and bring them out to protests to give out as well.

On a recent Wednesday, Yonah Riel, another Eugene Message Makers member, was painting a sign reading, "Supreme Court Supreme Betrayal. We Welcome All..."

She also began engaging in activism in the time since Trump took office.

Manas and Riel say that they expect more people to come to MECCA to work on signs prior to major protests.

Protest sign making is 11 am to 1 pm Wednesdays at MECCA, 555 High Street. Paint up to four signs for a donation of \$5 to \$10.



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