

Effort to Save Black Landmark

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

historic African-American community for generations.

Lodge Exalted Ruler Louis McLemore said that between maintenance, general overhead, and insurance premiums, it costs roughly \$100,000 a year to keep the beloved lodge at 6 N. Tillamook Street open and operational.

Restore Oregon reported that McLemore and others are working tirelessly to save and plan for the rehabilitation of the structure, which serves as headquarters for Portland's only remaining African American fraternal organization, but they need help from the community.

Although Billy Webb Elks Lodge has insurance coverage, it is estimated that full repairs and mitigation could take at least a year to complete.

While the lodge does collect fees from its members, the vast majority of its operating budget comes from rental of its ballroom, kitchen and bar for events, classes, meetings, and shows, all of which are impossible for the foreseeable future, officials said.

The fire hit just as the lodge was starting to bounce back from public health restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic.

The lodge first served as the African American branch of the Portland YWCA and was part of a larger historical context of "Colored Women's Clubs" in early 20th-century Oregon, Restore Oregon said.

For a four-year period during WWII, the lodge was loaned to the United Service Organization (USO) for use as a recreation center for African American servicemen. In 1948, the building was used as an emergen-



The ballroom of the Billy Webb Elks Lodge ballroom is damaged by a fire believed to have been started by trespassers cooking outside. A gofundme.com campaign is helping raise donations to make repairs.

cy shelter during the Vanport Flood disaster providing shelter to the African American community, which was disproportionately impacted.

In 1956, the Portland Branch of the NAACP established its first official headquarters in the basement of the lodge, focusing on African American community issues like the value of organized opposition, state support for education, housing accessibility, discrimination in labor unions, and displacement by urban renewal programs in inner northeast Portland.

During the 1950s and 60s the site became a meeting place for Black community groups like the Urban

League of Portland and the Congress of Racial Equality. In 1959 it was sold by the YWCA to the Improved Benevolent & Protective Order of the Elks (IBPOEW) who own and occupy it today.

For many more years, Billy Webb Elks hopes to continue its legacy of uplifting the surrounding African American community through fellowship, benevolence, charity, citizenship programs, economic, and business objectives.

To contribute to the rebuilding fund, visit gofundme.com/f/historic-billy-webb-elks-lodge-devastated-by-fire/.

Supporting Oregonians COPING WITH PROBLEM GAMBLING

Times Are Changing

Summer. The season so many of us have waited for, with its promise of cheerful weather, camping, daytrips, and street fairs — so much to do! And, this year, we're able to make summer plans with fewer cares around social distancing and masks. As vaccination levels increase, our worries start to lessen. Dare we say it? Life feels like it's getting back to normal this summer.

But right on the heels of those comforting thoughts, some of us still have doubts. We're encouraged to continue taking precautions for public health. Many of our favorite summer gatherings are still holding off. Even the sunny skies and warm weather sometimes turn into too much of a good thing. Coping with all the change can feel like a bit of a roller coaster. For some of us, issues like problem gambling can be harder to control when life still feels so uncertain.

Help is Available

Luckily, here in Oregon, help is available. Through the Oregon Problem Gambling Resource (OPGR), gamblers and those who love them can get support from trained addiction counselors, often right from home. Treatment is effective. People are ready and waiting to provide mechanisms to cope and to heal. And, best of all, it's free.

Why Wait?

Most people who get started with OPGR report that they only wish they had done so sooner. The program helps see you through some of the challenges ahead and gives you the confidence, the support structure to feel better. All it takes is a phone call, a text or an online chat to put you on the path toward the calm and fulfillment you deserve.

For more information, visit →

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