

# More Funds Needed to Restore Billy Webb Elks Lodge

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

development of hands-on restoration skills.

“Every term we do workshops, where we actually designed and built the windows to replace the ones that were destroyed,” he said. “In the spring we glazed the windows and for our final workshop we installed them with students and community members.”

Students came from as far away as California to take part in the restoration program, Prochaska said. “It’s been a really great partnership with Restore Oregon and Deborah Roach, and we’re anxious to do more,” Prochaska said.

If enough money comes in to continue the work, Roache said phase 2 of the reconstruction could conceivably be complete by December.

“Phase 2 should complete the inside work in the ballroom, and the city won’t allow us to open up until it’s safe,” she said.

Before the fire, plans were being made to work on other parts of the building, she said, including a basement remodel, to provide more space to rent out.

“Our main source of income is space rental,” Roache said. “So, what was phase 1, pre-fire, is now phase 3 or 4.”



Carla Stanlick and Deborah A. Roache and the Elk's Lodge

Along with fundraising from the public, Roache said she’s waiting to hear from other organizations about helping, but without the help of Restore Oregon, the work wouldn’t have been done.

“They know where those grants lie,” she said. “Their main focus is to restore endangered buildings in Oregon, and we’re one of the most endangered places.”

Nicole Possert, executive director of Restore Oregon, agrees with Roache.



“The Elks Lodge is part of the program of Oregon’s most endangered places, and we give technical support and wrap-around services so they can get their needs met,” she said. “We have been working with them since 2019, before the fire, to bolster the work that needed to be done, but the fire supercharged it.”

Restore Oregon, a nonprofit, has pledged to continue advising on reconstructing the lodge, from project management to finding the right experts, to its establishment last year of the Albina

Preservation Initiative “to help bridge the gap between traditional historic preservation practices and lived experiences of BIPOC communities.” That initiative led to the involvement of Clatsop Community College in replacing the windows, she said.

“There are more windows to do, and the Elks are raising money to reopen, but we will continue to help in whatever way we can,” Posser said. “We’re there in the long run.”

The Billy Webb Elks Lodge at 6 North Tillamook Street, is more

than just a historic building. According to Oregon Encyclopedia, the lodge “is a reminder of the city’s largely segregated history and is a key landmark for the African American community.

Originally built by the Young Women’s Christian Association as an outreach to Portland’s small African American Community, after the passage of a law in 1953 outlawing racial discrimination and completion of a new YWCA headquarters downtown, the building was sold to the Billy Webb Elks, named for a prominent local musician, according to the encyclopedia. But by the end of the 20th century, the building was in serious disrepair.

According to the encyclopedia, a major renovation of the lodge was undertaken in 2008-2009 with the help of the National Association of Minority Contractors of Oregon, to build a new roof, new mechanical systems, and a ramp system to allow access by those with disabilities.

But the fire caused extensive damage to that work, and now, because of its historic and cultural significance, the lodge and its supporters hope that enough funds can be raised to bring the building back to the point that it can continue serving Portland’s African American community.

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