

PEELING THE ONION

Litch building restoration moving forward

Developer finds treasures in Enterprise structure

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

A good bit of structural work remains to be done in the Litch Building on the corner of River and Main in Enterprise, but developer Andy McKee of McKee Brothers Investments says it's like a treasure hunt inside the building.

"We're not just slapping a coat of paint on this stuff," he said. "We are starting from scratch and trying to restore history that was basically covered up for 80 years."

Starting from scratch included removing what has been layered onto the original building. In tearing out lathe and plaster, huge double doors, arches and windows have been revealed. Bowly stone with hand-chisel marks from the early 1900s have been uncovered.

Stained glass windows, rare textured glass windows made with chicken wire embedded in it, an ancient freight elevator and a steel header that runs the full length of the front of the building are other revelations.

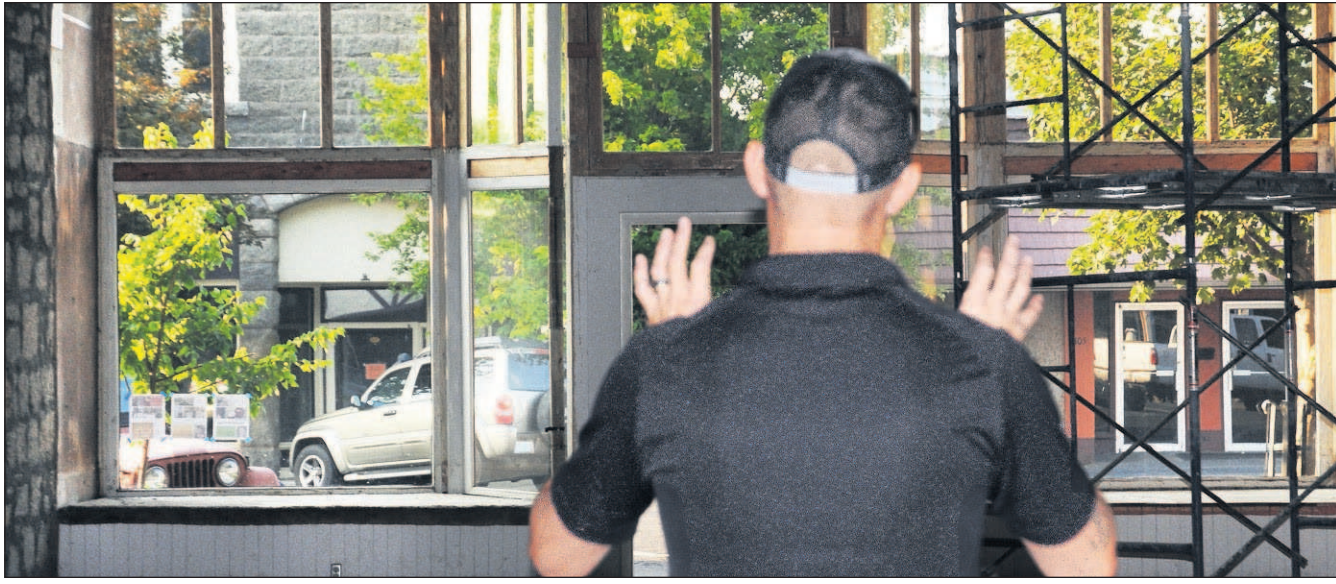
That elevator is mystifying workers. That massive length of steel was transported to Enterprise before the railroad was available. How did builders do that?

Even the alley out back is the "coolest side of the building," McKee said.

A group of city council members and a few fans of McKee's work gathered in late August to hear about his progress and vision.

"My vision is to restore it back to its original flavor," he said. "I think it would be best for Enterprise to have the facade historically correct. This is not easy to do."

Restoration includes finding giant 850-pound window frames, which must be restored out of old-growth fir, finding matching glass or having artisans recreate glass that is no longer available commercially.



Andy McKee explains his ambitious vision for the historic Litch Building during a walk-through tour taken by Enterprise City Council, Aug. 21.



Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain
An example of the aged wiring McKee's crew had to completely tear out and replace in the Litch Building.



The Litch Building on Main and River Street in Enterprise.

"Just to salvage this floor alone, in what used to be Sugar Time Bakery, we had three weeks of manpower in here: it was Pergo over old linoleum panels that were asphalted on," McKee said.

McKee is also balancing his intent to create the new spaces inside as modern and energy efficient as possible keeping in mind what will rent.

"There's a reason why rental turnover is so high here, and that's because nobody has figured out the right recipe," he said. "That's really what we're trying to do — figure out the right recipe."

That means experimentation and a bit of risk-taking.

"We don't necessarily know what will work. This is kind of an evolving process," McKee said. "My biggest hurdle and struggle is there are only a limited amount of people in the county who want to go into business — most of those people have their own businesses. With 80 percent

of Main Street in Enterprise vacant, how do we get people to say 'hey, I want to take my business to Enterprise.'"

Putting the "we" in downtown revitalization is crucial to its success, McKee says, noting the work of other revitalization entrepreneurs on Main Street: Michael and Jody Berry, Darrell Brann and Bill Warnock and Michelle Starr. But support also needs to come from all of the existing downtown businesses.

To that end McKee would like to see a "why not Enterprise" movement.

"If I don't have the community support, I'd rather go somewhere else," he said. "I hashtag all our (communications) with 'why not Enterprise?'"

More help may be coming in the form of grants. Historical tours of Enterprise are being scheduled with grantors who have already expressed an interest in the restoration and revitalization of not only the

RECOGNIZING THE RICHES OF ENTERPRISE

The corner section of the Litch Building was built in the 1880s as a saloon and was partially destroyed by fire in 1901. A single story was rebuilt by W.K. Funk and Sons.

Sam Litch bought the building and added a second story 1901-10, the same period in which his architect, Calvin R. Thorton, also built the Wallowa County Courthouse. Thorton actually died as a result of a construction accident during the Litch Building project, McKee said.

McKee's plans for the building remain mostly the same as when he first undertook the restoration: eight apartments and three temporary rental

units upstairs, remodeled retail spaces in the 10,000 square feet below.

There may be more short-term rental units in the Litch building because McKee's early experience turning a luxury apartment in the Burnaugh Building into short-term has been extraordinarily successful.

"People are like, 'Oh man, I had no idea Enterprise was so cool,'" McKee said. "I think having people stay here in something cool and historic is going to benefit Enterprise."

McKee is also completing construction of new micro-offices in the Burnaugh Building that rent for \$300 to \$400 monthly with all services included.

Litch Building but the entire Main Street.

Representatives from the State Historic Preservation Association have visited McKee before and will visit again soon.

"When I bought this (Litch) building, the preservation coordinator for the

whole state called me and said 'please save that building' because it has been on the radar for a long time," McKee said.

Community support is essential to obtaining the grants.

McKee's work on the exterior of the building has been

stalled recently as he works his way through a State Historic Preservation Association facade grant and family business — he has recently moved his 80-year-old mother to the county.

"This building is my Everest," McKee said.

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