

John Day's 'Golden Flower' is open — and growing

Kam Wah Chung is awarded \$1 million for new interpretive center



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Go! Magazine

JOHN DAY — These are golden days indeed for one of John Day's most valuable and historical treasures.

The doors are wide open at Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site, welcoming visitors once again after being closed last season. And true to its translation — “Golden Flower of Prosperity” — this is also a blooming time for Kam Wah Chung.

Thanks to generous spending at the end of the 2021 Oregon legislative session, the city of John Day recently received \$1 million toward a long-anticipated new and larger interpretive center for the site.

Kam Wah Chung, part of the Oregon State Parks system, showcases the influence of Chinese miners and immigrants in the early days of Grant County and Eastern Oregon. The interpretive center features a wealth of informational displays, exhibits, a gift shop and research space.

Nearby, on Ing Hay Way, is the museum — the actual general store where Chinese businessmen Ing “Doc” Hay and Lung On ran a successful enterprise from 1888-1948.

More than a store, however, the building also provided such services as a stage stop, medical clinic, religious center and gathering place for the local community. Chinese miners, local residents and pioneers traveling through the rural wilds of the region all benefited from this vital venture. The building was also the private residence for the business partners.

Visitors to the museum will find that it has been preserved, with furniture, medicinal herbs, dry goods, diaries, ledgers and other documents — in Chinese — nearly untouched. It's as if “Doc” Hay and Lung On just stepped away for the day.

In fact, the building and its contents were truly untouched for many years. Following Hay's death in 1952, the abandoned property was forgotten until 1967, when the city of John Day launched plans for a new park in that location. The city,

discovering their ownership of the building along with Hay's wishes that it be turned into a museum, began work toward restoring and preserving this treasure.

In 1973, Kam Wah Chung made it to the National Register of Historic Places, and in 2005, it was declared a National Historic Landmark. Continued fundraising efforts from politicians and The Friends of Kam Wah Chung have kept preservation goals alive. Documentaries by such media outlets as Oregon Public Broadcasting and the Discovery Channel have kept the spotlight shining.

The interpretive center is at 125 NW Canton St. in John Day. The museum is across the street on Ing Hay Way. The interpretive center's hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. Museum tours, both virtual and in-person, are available on the hour between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. daily. Appointments are encouraged, since space is limited.

Admission is free to both. Kam Wah Chung is open through Oct. 31. For more information, call 541-575-2800.

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