

Fate of historic Hot Springs building unknown after fire

March 30, 2023
BY MARGO OXENDINE • STAFF WRITER

HOT SPRINGS – Now that the initial shock of the fire early last Wednesday morning in Hot Springs is sinking in, there are two chief things folks want to know: What caused the fire? Will they rebuild and repair the damage?

Those are answers for which we all must wait.

In the meantime, barricades are up across the front and rear entrances of the old Hot Springs Drug Store, which housed Les Cochons d'Or restaurant, the Jackson River Café, and some vacation rental apartments upstairs in the historic building.

No one was injured in the fire.

The fire was noticed at about 4 a.m. last Wednesday morning. Kyle Krieger, the chef and an owner of the two restaurants, received an alert on his home system, and went immediately to the building. He tried to extinguish the fire himself, but it was too much for one man.

Building owner Pat Haynes praised local electrician and fireman Jack Lindsay, who heard the initial call and hustled downtown to help. Krieger was still in the process of trying to extinguish the fire. But, Haynes said, when Lindsay walked inside, “he sees the fire erupt again and go up the wall.” It was Lindsay, Haynes said, who raced upstairs to get the people out of one of the rental apartments. Then, he went behind the building, where the 1,000-gallon propane tank that served the restaurant is, and turned off the gas. “Jack Lindsay is a Hot Springs hero,” Haynes said.

Six fire departments responded, some within minutes. They came from Hot Springs, Falling Spring, Covington, Dunlap, Millboro and Bolar stations. It took more than seven hours to get the raging fire under control. Haynes said he was told it took 325,000 gallons of water to quell the fire.

Thursday morning, Crystal Krieger, of LCdO and JRC, could only stand by and watch with a woeful look on her face. The couple had worked very hard to open the first restaurant, LCdO, an upscale dining establishment, in 2014, in which the couple is partners of John and Kate Loeffler. Later last year, the adjacent space, which housed the old drug store, was renovated into a beautiful, more casual, dining space. The Kriegers and Haynes worked to create a space that would attract guests for breakfast and lunch. There were lots of river-themed decorations, including a gorgeous wooden bar with a clear glass top that depicted an under-river scene. That bar survived the fire, as did most of the pressed-tin ceiling. Some of the tables and chairs still sat Thursday, where they'd been since the café opened.

It was not possible for onlookers to get a peek into the damages to the adjacent restaurant. And, no one – including the Kriegers and Haynes – was allowed into the building until all inspectors had visited.

There were at least five inspectors on the slate for an assessment visit: the fire inspector, at least two restaurant insurers, the building insurer, and a machinery insurer, Haynes told The Recorder Friday. Although the cause of the fire has not been determined, and may not be for at least a week, a Virginia State Police crime inspector was also expected to visit.

It was also not determined whether the structure itself would be salvageable. Haynes said a commercial claims specialist from St. Louis is scheduled to arrive this week and consult with a structural engineer. Then, a determination will be made on whether the building can be salvaged and restored. In the meantime, Haynes said Monday he is moving what he can get out, and storing it in the Odd Fellows building a few doors down.

The ABC liquor store, which shares a wall with the historic pharmacy, was also closed. While the bottles of liquor did not explode, the place suffered smoke damage, and must be thoroughly cleaned before opening again.

Many who stopped by during the day to take a look at the aftermath of the fire noted it was “a blessing” the liquor bottles did not explode. Haynes added, “It was also a blessing that the wind, which has been quite high, was not blowing that night as much as it had been. That could have brought even more devastation.”

Another “good” story on the street involved a contractor, who had been staying in one of the upstairs apartments with his wife. When alerted to get out fast, they did. However, the contractor realized later he had left his passport and credit cards in the apartment.

Later, he somehow managed to get back into the space and, sifting through ashes and detritus, found his passport under a pile of clothes that had protected it from being destroyed. Haynes heaped praise on the various fire personnel who responded and worked diligently to put out the blaze.

“The fire was incredibly frustrating to watch,” Haynes said Tuesday. “It took a tremendous effort to control, but they managed the best they could, and stopped it from spreading even further.” Haynes added that he has been amazed by the “outpouring of prayers and support from the community. All of us loved that historic building; it was 102 years old. Our Main Street was doing so well, in conjunction with the renovations to The Homestead and to the Warm Springs Pools. We were on our way! And then, this happens, and we get the rug pulled out from under us.”

Fate of Hot Springs building undetermined after fire

April 06, 2023

BY MARGO OXENDINE • STAFF WRITER

HOT SPRINGS – Is the historic Hot Springs Drug Store, which housed two popular restaurants and some apartments, burned in a fire Wednesday, March 22, capable of being saved? Or must it be demolished?

“The situation is just not clear,” building owner Pat Haynes said Monday.

It could be at least two weeks before insurance companies and adjusters make that determination. Meanwhile, the building, constructed in 1921, sits forlorn and visibly damaged.

“There is just so much damage,” Haynes said sadly. “It would be prohibitively expensive to build it again; I know that for certain.”

Haynes also owns the liquor store building, which is adjacent to, and shares a wall with, the old pharmacy. The liquor store remains closed. “A major clean-up is needed,” Haynes said.

He is hopeful the liquor store can be saved and rebuilt, regardless of the fate of the old pharmacy. The exact cause of the fire also remains undetermined.

“We think we know where it started, but not how it started,” Haynes said. That decision, too, should come in the next two weeks.

Haynes loved the building, which housed Les Cochons d’Or restaurant, the Jackson River Café, and several vacation rental apartments upstairs.

“It is so historic,” he said. “I would like to be able to preserve that history. It is designated as an historic building, in a way that would not be allowed today. It might not make economic sense.”

Haynes plans to meet soon with Bath building inspectors and planners and see what his options might be.

“I still haven’t been able to find out what the codes would be,” he said. “The way I see it is, I have two options. And neither of them is optimal. I can tear it down or save it and bring it back.” Haynes sighed. “It is not a pretty story. We are dealing with a disaster. I truly don’t know what I am going to do. It is so sad. The whole situation is a moving target right now.”

Drug store building still posing dilemma

May 04, 2023

BY MARGO OXENDINE • STAFF WRITER

HOT SPRINGS – In the early morning hours of Wednesday, March 22, a fire raced through the historic Hot Springs Drug Store building, along with two popular restaurants that were housed inside. The adjacent liquor store – Bath’s only one – was attached to the drug store building and has not yet been given the OK to open.

Building owner Pat Haynes faces a dilemma: Should he rebuild the building, or should he have it torn down and build anew? It is a difficult and gut-wrenching choice.

“I am spending a lot of time speaking to architects and engineers,” Haynes said this week. “I’ve been hoping to salvage the building, but it is not a done deal yet. I have talked to a lot of people, who say there is a lot of value still in that building. It just comes down to figuring it out.”

In the meantime, the façade of the building remains standing. It is blocked off by barricades and yellow tape. The rear of the building seems to be in worse shape than the front. The apartments

and an office housed on the second floor suffered catastrophic damage. No one was injured in the fire.

The couple who ran Le Cochons d'Or restaurant and the Jackson River Café, Kyle and Crystal Krieger, had their office upstairs. They lost most of their documents, including recipes and an extensive compendium of Crystal's wine research. She is a well-respected sommelier. Kyle, the chef, also had an excellent reputation for great and innovative food.

According to Haynes, the Kriegers would like to re-open the restaurants, if possible, in their original location. But that has not been definitely determined.

"It all comes down to assessing the building as it is," Haynes said. "What can I do with it, and what would it cost?"

While the liquor store suffered only smoke damage, it will take a lot of effort to clean it up. And since it shares a wall with the damaged pharmacy building, it is not determined yet whether it is completely safe.

"We need to get the liquor store opened back up again soon," Haynes said. "People are going crazy." The next closest liquor stores are in Monterey and in Covington.

As far as making a final decision about the damaged building, Haynes said, "I am getting very close."

Cause of downtown Hot Springs building fire determined

| May 25, 2023

BY MARGO OXENDINE • STAFF WRITER

HOT SPRINGS – After two months, the cause of the fire that devastated the old pharmacy in downtown Hot Springs has been determined.

Building owner Pat Haynes told The Recorder Tuesday that inspectors pointed to a propane leak as the origin of the fire in the early morning hours of March 22.

"They do not know which piece of the propane tank was responsible," Haynes said. "But they know where it was, and what caused it: a leak in the line."

The propane tank is located behind the old pharmacy, which had been remodeled into two restaurants, with apartments on the upper floor.

Haynes added, "The decision has not been made whether it will be a total demolition, or a partial demolition."

That determination may come later this week.

"I am not sure whether we will try to get rid of all the fire damage and rebuild, or just have to take the building down."

In the meantime, both restaurants – Les Cochons d'Or and the Jackson River Café, operated by Kyle and Crystal Krieger – are closed, as is the liquor store adjacent to the pharmacy, which shares a wall with the building. It is obvious from glancing at the building that the upper floors are a total loss.

No one was injured in the fire.

Hot Springs drug store fate still undecided after fire; liquor store to be remodeled

| July 13, 2023

BY MARGO OXENDINE • STAFF WRITER

HOT SPRINGS – While the back end of the old Hot Springs Drug Store is being demolished, it is still undecided whether the street front is worth, and capable of being, renovated.

Building owner Pat Haynes said this week that the liquor store adjacent, and connected by one wall, to the drug store will indeed be remodeled, and will reopen as soon as it is ready.

Kyle and Crystal Krieger, who operated Les Cochons d'Or restaurant and the Jackson River Café, have made the decision that they will not reopen.

The businesses were badly damaged in a fire March 22, 2023.

Former Hot Springs Pharmacy building plans 'progressing'

| August 24, 2023

BY MARGO OXENDINE • STAFF WRITER

HOT SPRINGS – Plans are progressing slowly on what to do with the former Hot Springs Pharmacy, which was heavily damaged in a fire March 22 of this year.

But the key word is “progressing.”

Building owner Pat Haynes has hired a Charlottesville architect with local ties to Hidden Valley, Steve vonStorch, who has also brought aboard a structural engineer from Charlottesville.

Friday, they and a crew will be surveying the building, using a three-dimensional scan they will set up on a tripod.

At this point, the building is basically an outer shell, with permanent demolition slated for the inside.

“We are still trying to map out how to put a roof on it,” Haynes said. “We will go from there to the apartments upstairs and the commercial space downstairs. I’ve gotten a lot of information, and experienced people. I am optimistic!”

Varsity building gets new tenant

In other Haynes property news, the old Cucci’s at the Varsity was leased Tuesday for use as a convenience store and café.

The new lessee is Mansoor Ahmad, who hopes to be open to start serving breakfast, lunch and dinner sometime in September.

The building has been closed for two years, but is sparkled up, and ready for a new business.