The

# COTTAGE GROVE ARMORY

## SIGNAL

A quarterly newsletter showcasing the restoration efforts and potential of a local historic landmark



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PUBLISHER

#### **Christina Lund**

CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, ARMORY PROJECT

**Richard Meyers**CITY OF COTTAGE GROVE

# HISTORY WORTH PRESERVING

Local historian recalls Armory's military past

BY JON STINNETT

"I've just got to show you one more thing." By this point in our conversation, Ed Smith's "one more thing" has become several, as each new artifact he displays leads to an impassioned discussion of its historical significance and the often circuitous but always dogged route Smith himself has sometimes taken to uncover that history. Together, the items he's collected over the years form a web of American — most often American military — history, in addition to the physical manifestation of a passion for our nation's people and their stories that has driven him toward new discoveries for decades. It's a passion that's infectious to any history lover, and it lights up this longtime Cottage Grove resident as he tells these stories through the objects that still carry the weight, the power and emotions of monumental days gone by. "You just never know what you're going to come across," he says. "It gets in your blood, and you realize it's an honor to even touch it."

As a longtime Grover, Smith has often found himself attracted to and curious about local



Cottage Grove's Ed Smith examines a 1939 copy of the "Oregon Guardsman."

military history, a curiosity that inevitably leads to the Cottage Grove Armory, the local home of the Oregon National Guard from the building's dedication in 1931 to its decommissioning in 2009. There's much to be learned, for example, in a 1939 Oregon National Guard yearbook, the "Oregon Guardsman," that includes accounts of Battery E of the 249th Coast Artillery, stationed at the Armory at that time.

Please see HISTORY, page 6

## **Possibilities**

### Recent, future events highlight Armory's potential

# MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE HONORS THE FALLEN

Held at the Armory since 2011, organizers say the ceremony has found its home there

On Monday, May 29, Cottage Grove came together downtown to honor those who gave their lives for this nation with a Memorial Day ceremony held in a building that has long symbolized the community's warm and enduring relationship with the Armed Forces. American Legion



Post 32 and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3473 hosted a ceremony that included patriotic songs such as "America the Beautiful" and the National Anthem. It also included the solemn reading of the names of local veterans who have passed on in the last year, in addition to the first

inductee on a Wall of Honor to commemorate those who gave their lives in the Viet Nam conflict.
Brigadier General (Ret.) Mike Bridges, who commanded the Alaska National Guard during his tenure, told the large crowd about

that first inductee,

Please see

CEREMONY, page 3

## ICE CREAM SOCIAL TO CELEBRATE COMMUNITY

First annual event scheduled Saturday, Aug. 26

Friends, family and neighbors have been gathering together to enjoy a frigid treat on a hot summer day for centuries, and ice cream often finds itself at the forefront of our biggest celebrations.

So the promoters of restoration efforts at the Cottage Grove Armory thought, 'What better way to bring Cottage Grove together than to host an Ice Cream Social at one of its most iconic downtown buildings?'

Thus, the first annual
Cottage Grove Armory
Ice Cream Social will be held
on Saturday, Aug. 26 from 1-5 p.m. at
the Armory, located at 628 Washington Avenue downtown. It promises to
be an afternoon full of great snacks,
music and classic games, and a street
fair will even be taking place outside
the building. In short, we're planning
a good old-fashioned fun family event
— and we hope you'll be excited to
be a part of it, too!

Though it has served as one of Cottage Grove's premier gathering places and a hub of cultural activity since its construction in 1931, the Armory now needs the public's help and major renovation work before it can again attain its potential to serve all members of this community and attract visitors for a quality Cottage Grove experience.

While it's primarily planned as a community celebration, we hope the Ice Cream Social can also serve for many as a sign of the Armory's potential, and that for others it can conjure fond memories of happy times spent there. Additionally, all funds raised during the social will go toward the restoration effort.

## **Spring Fest funds London programs**

Recognizing the need to draw a large crowd to a fundraiser for their music and art programs, London School chose Cottage Grove's biggest indoor gathering space. On Saturday, April 29, the first annual Spring Fest drew just such a group of supporters to the Cottage Grove Armory to enjoy barbeque and hear music by local acts Windy Ridge and Flies with Honey. And while London office manager and event co-planner April Sexton said the 1931 building did present some challenges, it also proved more than adequate to host their event.

Please see SPRING FEST, page 3



photo courtesy Snap Savage Photography
Family photo booth fun
highlighted the Spring
Fest.

## **Participation**

### How to get involved in the restoration effort

Much like the original construction project that brought the Armory to Cottage Grove, a coordinated community effort will be vital in its restoration.

Here's how you can help:

#### **Become a Donor**

Opportunities to contribute can be tailored

to your preferences and your budget.

#### Volunteer

There are many ways to contribute your time and talents to the restoration effort.

#### **Spread the Word**

Tell your friends and neighbors about the exciting event you recently attended at the Armory, or share stories about the many great memories you've made there over the years.

For more information on the Armory project or how you can contribute to the restoration effort, contact Christina Lund at 541-953-5377.

#### **CEREMONY** from page 2

Bill Sandefur, who happened to be Bridges' uncle. After Sandefur, of the 162nd Infantry stationed in Cottage Grove, was mortally wounded on Nov. 27, 1967, Bridges got the news that Uncle Bill wasn't coming home.

"I cried myself to sleep that night, and I vowed that I would grow up and replace my Uncle Bill in the Army," he said. Bridges told the assembly that "War

is not pleasant." "It is nasty, and people die," he said. "But that is why we are here today — to commemorate those who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our freedoms." Mayor Jeff Gowing, himself an Army veteran, also provided remarks on the occasion. Gowing said that he believes Cottage Grove's Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies have found the right home in the

Cottage Grove Armory, where both events have been held since 2011. He noted that the long association between Cottage Grove and the National Guard as exemplified by the Armory, gives the location for these ceremonies added significance, pointing out as an example that Bridges had begun a long and distinguished military career there.

### Jew's Harp Festival readies for Aug. 11-12 revival

The North American Jaw Harpists recently announced that a revival of the Jew's Harp Festival — held in Oregon

for nearly a quarter century until 2012 — will take place at the Armory Aug. 11-12. The event celebrates one of the oldest instruments known to humanity and the cultural significance of its unique sound.

## 'Wishlist' highlights Armory needs

Donations of items such as these can expand opportunities in the building:

\*6-foot resin tables
\*Indoor regulation basketballs
\*Full-size refrigerator
\*Vacuum
\*Galvanized pails
\*LED light strings

#### **SPRING FEST** from page 2

"The space worked out well for us," Sexton said. "Everybody had a good time. For our purposes, it was worth every penny and then some."

Sexton acknowledged a few shortcomings with the Armory, which was built for the Oregon National Guard and hosted its activities, in addition to many community gatherings, until the building was decommissioned in 2009. Today, extensive restoration efforts are underway to remedy some of the issues related to age that Sexton recalled, including sound system challenges and an upstairs balcony with aging banisters. Plans also call for the construction of a north tower to facilitate access to the stage in the Armory drill hall and the construction of a commercial kitchen and movie theater downstairs, as efforts continue to return the building to its status as a key community gathering place in downtown Cottage Grove. These are efforts Sexton said she wholeheartedly supports.

"I hope you can complete the restoration project," she said. "Every town needs many venues, and we don't that many. The more people you can get in for weddings and quinceaneras will fill up our hotels and restaurants, and that's what everybody wants."

She continued that "The Armory needs to be fixed up and utilized more, period, and it needs to be preserved just for the fact that it's historic."

# Progress

## Coordinator details fundraising efforts so far

In July of 2016, Cottage Grovebased development consultant Christina Lund and the City of Cottage Grove entered into a contract whereby Lund and her team pledged to write no less than 80 grants to secure the estimated \$3.2 million that will be necessary to properly renovate and update the Cottage Grove Armory for use by the community. A year later, Lund

looked back on the progress of fundraising and renovation efforts so far, in addition to what's to come for the Armory in the future:

Are you encouraged by the progress made and the response to the renovation project so far?

While there's still a lot of work to be done, I'm pleased with all the support that's been shown to the Armory in the early phase of fundraising and with the people that were willing to jump right in and support the project. I'm also very encouraged by the number of people using the Armory and asking for tours, people calling for information and the sheer volume of those who have offered to help. The number of people we've reached in our community and beyond is very impressive.

What steps have been taken in the early stages of the project to ensure its success? Have other developments in ad-

#### dition to fundraising helped the Armory fulfill its potential?

In the past year, we've completed the research and development phase of our fundraising strategy. We've also founded new and exciting events with the Mayor's Ball in October and the Ice Cream Social that's coming up in August, and we founded a quarterly newsletter. I've personally given over 40 tours of the building. Restoration of the Armory's windows has been completed, and we've purchased chairs and tables, chair covers and sashes for use during events. In

fact, we've procured lots of equipment and accessories to be used during events including background sets for the stage and stage lighting.

## Armory restoration fundraising

Numbers as of June 17, 2017, nearly one year into the fundraising campaign to raise approximately \$3.2 million

Contributed \$883,922

Pledged - \$220,000

Pending - \$598,500

Planned - \$691,500

## 'Panes' taken with window restoration

he beneifits of restored windows in the Cottage Grove Armory are many, according to officials with the City of Cottage Grove. Recently, workers including Chris Gustafson of Albany-based Vintage Window Restoration, LLC completed efforts to restore all 115 of the windows in the 1931 building, work that Gustafson estimates will add 100 years of life to the windows. Gustafson has performed similar work on many of the building's windows over the past two years, and he said that due to the age of the

Armory, many of the windows shared the same afflictions. "In some of them, we've dealt with rotten window sills and issues with the building's stucco finish," Gustafson said. "The common issues are typically that the putty in the windows begins to fail, paint starts to peel, the wood is depleted of oils and the deterioration goes on from there." In addition to cor-

ration goes on from there."
In addition to correcting these common issues, Cottage Grove City Planner Amanda Ferguson said the restoration of the windows was also driven by a desire to restore a key

feature of this historic building. She said the restoration also has financial benefits, as restoration was a far cheaper option that replacing each window.

Further, Ferguson said it was important to remove the lead paint on the old windows, as opening and closing the windows disturbed the lead paint and could be partly to blame for recent tests revealing slightly elevated levels of lead in the Armory. Window restoration is also expected to prevent further water damage.

"By restoring these 115 wood-framed,



Restoring the Armory's windows is expected to add years to their life and improve ventilation int he building.

double-hung windows, we have restored the building's original ventilation system, greatly reduced the lead based paint within the building, prevented further damage from water (through repair of damaged window sills and frames), and extended the life of these windows..."



#### MANY THANKS TO THE GENEROUS **DONORS OF THE COTTAGE GROVE ARMORY'S** RESTORATION

Ruth & Gary Ackley

Janice Albritton

American Legion Post 32

Kim Anderson

Cindy Armstrong

Axe & Fiddle Pub

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Banner Bank

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Belknap Properites, LLC

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**Bohemia Foundation** 

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Rhonda & Rick Worley

#### **HISTORY** from page 1

"There are a lot of Cottage Grove guys in here," Smith points out, including the commander at the time the yearbook was published, Captain LaSells Stewart. "I went to school with a lot of their kids."

their kids." Smith also tells his story of the discovery of a group of 10-inch Howitzer exploding shells that, he would eventually learn, were sent to Eastern Oregon to be disposed of but for some reason returned to Cottage Grove, where they served as counterbalance weights on a crane that once operated in the railyard where the City shop now stands. Similar bullets were once found atop the banisters of the steps

### "It's a very important part of Cottage Grove, and it's heritage we need to keep alive."

at the Armory's iconic front entrance, shells that have been brought back from the National Guard headquarters in Springfield to once again adorn that staircase.

For Smith, the journey to the past began largely through contact with longtime resident Ed Speers, parts of whose collection became Smith's own when Speers moved back east.

"Our sons went to school together," Smith says. "At the time, I didn't know he was into this stuff. Eventually, he gave a lot of it to me, including most anything there is to know about the Cottage Grove Armory — you want it, we've got it." When Smith heard that the City of Cottage Grove had purchased the Armory in 2010, he said he assumed that it would simply be returned to its function as a community center. "Considering what the building was built for, I was concerned that they were just going to forget about its history," he says. Later, friend Danny Solesbee approached Smith to inquire about any historical items

from the Armory that could be used to tell the building's history at an upcoming event, and he offered a tour of the building to detail plans for its renovation. Smith said he knew that "if we want to keep that tradition alive,' the story of the Armory must be told, and a stunning display of artifacts was assembled for the Mayor's Ball, a sort of coming-out party for efforts to restore the Armory held in October of 2016. Smith said the display gave him hope that the City is committed to commemorating the Armory's history and military associations.

And yet, Smith says his affinity for the building itself didn't start right away.

"I'd done military history forever but hadn't paid attention to it (the Armory) for years," he says. "But its history and its architecture make it a really neat place."

It's history that makes the Armory worth rehabilitating and sharing with future generations, according to Smith. "There are kids and grandkids still living here of some of the area's first soldiers, and many spent part or much of their military careers in this building," he said. "It's a very important part of Cottage Grove, and it's heritage we need to keep alive.

Now, I've just got to show you one more thing..."

