

Palm Springs Plaza Theatre restoration effort kicks off with \$50,000 donation

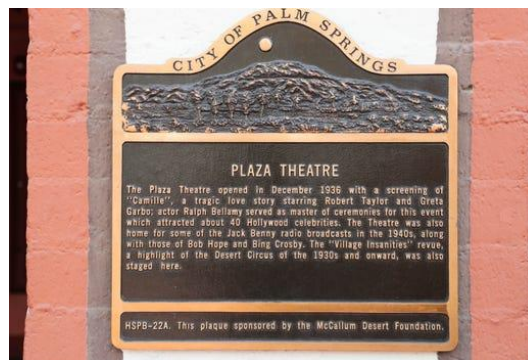
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Palm Springs' historic Plaza Theatre has been empty since 2014, but efforts to restore the decades-old facility got a boost that has supporters optimistic they can bring it back to life within a matter of years.

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation contributed \$50,000 for the project, expected to cost \$12 million. Organizers are now embarking on an ambitious undertaking that has them looking for a supportive celebrity to participate in a fundraiser.

Meanwhile, the Greater Palm Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau will use social media to find donors outside the region.

"It's a really strong community effort," foundation President Gary Johns said, adding it was his organization's largest contribution ever. "We'll get this ol' girl running again."



The theater was built in 1936 and was originally a movie venue. City officials have labeled it a "true architectural gem in the heart of downtown."

For 23 years, it was home to the "The Fabulous Palm Springs Follies," a Broadway-style vaudeville-like revue that consisted of elderly dancers and garnered rave reviews across the country. The Follies ended in 2014 and the theater's closure soon followed, much to the chagrin of nearby business owners who benefited from those attending the Follies.

The 800-seat theater would sit dormant for years, despite attempts to reopen its doors as debate over renovation and restoration presented itself.

Palm Springs International Film Festival Chairman Harold Matzner offered funding to renovate the building so that it could be used for the annual showcase of films. Actress Suzanne Somers later offered up to \$1 million to fix up the theater so that she could hold her own performances.



The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation presented a \$50,000 contribution Thursday to go toward restoring the Palm Springs Plaza Theatre. Supporters need \$12 million to complete restoration. (Photo: Colin Atagi/The Desert Sun)

Their involvement hasn't been ruled out, but officials for now envision a site for a variety of entertainment, Palm Springs City Councilman J.R. Roberts said Thursday.

At least two or three years may pass before the theater reopens.

Once funding is secured, the first steps will involve repairing utilities and making sure it's safe for people to enter, he said. Otherwise, little else needs to be done since most of the building is "intact" and mostly just needs "a cleanup and polish," Roberts said.

Efforts are being overseen by a steering committee consisting of 20 people, along with two chairmen. Anyone interested in contributing to the cause can do so on the city's website.

Officials seem to be convinced the interest is there.

"I think people still feel more hope than heartbreak," Roberts said.



The Plaza Theatre in downtown Palm Springs is among the properties that once belonged to the city's redevelopment agency. (Photo: Rob Hopwood/The Desert Sun)