



Grimes resident seeks to restore historic building

A Grimes resident who says he wants to put down roots in his community and create something he can be proud of in 40 years has taken on a challenge that has eluded others over the last few decades: Rehabilitate the city's oldest building.

Ryan Burger, a magazine publisher who has lived in Grimes and also has an office there, purchased the Grimes Independent Order of Odd Fellows building last spring and plans to restore it to its 1900-1910 glory by next summer.

And it's none too soon; the 5,700-square-foot, two-story building recently was named to Preservation Iowa's list of the most endangered Iowa properties of 2011.

"I found out about it through the Grimes chamber, and it caught my interest right away because I've always wanted to have an office in downtown Grimes," Burger said. "There's been an effort going on in Grimes now to rehabilitate that part of town, and I'd like to contribute to that."

Preservation Iowa's judging panel said it chose to include the 110-year-old property on its list because the building "stands as a testament to the many private, civic and cultural events that took place in the building over its existence."

The building, which has been determined eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, was once a grand opera house; it's now been condemned by the city of Grimes. Preservation Iowa's report said the building "has fallen into disrepair, is structurally unsound, and has been recognized as a generally unsafe structure."

None of those things deters Burger, though.

"Like so many things of value, it simply needs the right kind of attention," he said. "I'm certainly aware of all the work it needs, but we've gotten started and are optimistic that we can get the funding together to get the work done, and do it well."

Burger said he's been working to stabilize the building, especially its north wall, and to deter transients from living in the structure because it's not yet safe. When all is said and done, he hopes to restore the building to its former glory — not as the Grimes Opera House or Independent Order

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of Odd Fellows Lodge, but as a mixed-use building residents can be proud of.

“In addition to having my own office there, I’d like to rent out the majority of the space, and I’d love for it to include a mid-level restaurant with an outdoor patio,” he said.

“Grimes has almost doubled in size since I’ve been here, and I’d really like to have a stamp of my own in town — something that will benefit the town and let me say in 30 or 40 years, ‘I did that.’ ”

John Koester, who sat on Preservation Iowa’s panel of judges and is a member of the Governors’ District Alliance in Grimes, said he has no doubt Burger can do what he says he’s going to do, and that he can plan for a grand opening next summer. Koester, who also lives in Grimes, is helping Burger put together financial sources for the project.

“Ryan has the business that he can put in the office space, and he also has the desire to entice people back downtown to Main Street again,” Koester said. “The economic development on Main Street is in its infancy, and Ryan is a perfect person to be a part of the development.”

Koester said the total price tag for the rehabilitation will be about \$1.5 million. The money will be acquired primarily through grants, and the building also will be eligible for state and federal tax credits for structures of historical significance, he said.

“The city of Grimes has been awesome to work with, and we’re looking forward to a successful outcome for Ryan,” Koester said. “We’re hoping when all is said and done, it will complement the other buildings that are there and create more foot traffic for the downtown district.”



Learn more

Preservation Iowa, formerly the Iowa Historic Preservation Alliance, was created in 1991 to forge partnerships in historic preservation and provide advocacy, education and recognition of Iowa’s historic preservation activities. To learn more, visit www.preservationiowa.org .

To learn more about efforts to rehabilitate the Grimes Independent Order of Odd Fellows building, visit www.grimesioofbuilding.org .

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