

Sunset For Route 66 Preservation?

The Road Ahead Partnership Steps In To Fill The Gap

by Melissa Lea Beasley and Jerry Ueckert

On May 23rd, 2017, the Albuquerque Journal ran an Associated Press article by Russell Contreras titled, "Losing Their Kicks? Funds For Route 66 Towns May Be At Risk." Similar stories ran in papers and on TV news across the country detailing the sunset of legislation which authorized the National Park Service to administer the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, which was created by congressional legislation in 1999.

The National Park Service (NPS) administered matching fund preservation grants that made possible the restoration of properties and neon signs in each state traversed by Route 66. In New Mexico, some of those projects included the Blue Swallow Motel sign in Tucumcari, El Comedor's "Rotosphere" in Moriarty and the sign and building front of the Lexington Hotel in Gallup. NPS also facilitated Route 66 oral history projects in partnership with UNM's English Department as well as providing access to historical and informational research materials for scholars and tourists.

Many people were justifiably alarmed at the news of the sunset of preservation legislation, but beginning in 2014, in anticipation of the de-funding of their programs, NPS along with Route 66 stakeholders and the World Monuments Fund facilitated the creation of "The Road Ahead Partnership" whose mission it is "to revitalize and sustain Route 66 as a national and international icon, for the benefit of all Route 66 communities, travelers, and businesses/attractions, through collaborative partnerships focused on promotion, preservation, research/education, and economic development."

Pending legislation monitored and supported by The Road Ahead Partnership includes HR801, a bill introduced into Congress by Rep. Darin LaHood (R-IL) that would designate Route 66 as a National Historic Trail. Bill Thomas, chairman of The Road Ahead Partnership, said, "With the impending sunset of the NPS Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program in 2019, it is important that Route 66 gain this designation."

Other Legislation includes HR66, introduced by Rep. Rodney Davis [R-IL], which would establish a Route 66 100th Anniversary Celebration Commission. Says Thomas, "The Mother Road's 100th birthday will be in 2026 and we want to be prepared for a grand celebration."

For further information, the partnership has launched a new website: www.route66roadahead.org



Route 66 Road Ahead Partnership Board of Directors Meeting, February 16-18, 2017. (Albuquerque, New Mexico)

To **Row**, Left to Right: Brad Nickson (BOD, President of OK Rt 66 Assoc.), Tommy Pike (BOD, President of MO Rt 66 Assoc.), Renee Charles (BOD/Secretary, President of KS Historic Rt. 66 Assoc./Rt. 66 Assoc. of KS), Sharlene Fouser (BOD, AZ Rt 66 Scenic Byway Program), Cindy Carson (Member, NM Rt 66 Assoc.), Melissa Lea Beasley (BOD, President of NM Rt 66 Assoc.), Aimee Awonohopay (Tribal Advisory Group [TAG], Southwest Region Board Member, American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association).

Bottom Row, Left to Right: Kaisa Barthuli (Program Manager, Rt 66 Corridor Preservation Program, Nat'l Trails Intermountain Region, National Park Service), David Bricker (BOD/Vice Chairman of the Board & Chair of the Preservation Working Group, Deputy District Director, CA DOT), Scott Piotrowski (BOD, Secretary of CA Historic Rt66 Assoc., John J. Miller (BOD, Board Member of IL Rt66 Assoc.), David Dunaway (BOD & Chair of Research & Education Working Group, Senior Professor of English, Univ. of New Mexico), Larry Clonts (BOD, Director of Economic Development, Shamrock, TX Old Rt66 Assoc.), Bill Thomas (Chairman of the Board, Director of Economic Development, Logan Co, IL), Emerson R. Vallo (Chairman of Tribal Advisory Group [TAG], Southwest Region Board Member, American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association), Jeff Fulgenzie (BOD & Chair of the Economic Development Working Group, Owner of Mahan Filling Station, Springfield, IL), Bill Kelly (Treasurer & Chair of the Promotion Working Group, Ex Director of IL Rt 66 Scenic Byway), Aaron Mahr (Superintendent, Nat'l Trails Intermountain Region, National Park Service).

Not Pictured: John Conoboy, (Chairman of National Historic Trail Task Force), Amy Webb and Grant Stevens (Representatives from the National Trust for Historic Preservation).