

July 27, 2023

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION (Images Attached)

Task Force Organized to Repair Hail Damaged Route 66 Neon Signs in Tucumcari

The New Mexico Route 66 Association and Tucumcari MainStreet have joined forces to repair devastating hail damage to iconic Route 66 neon signs. Not a single historic roadside neon sign survived golf ball sized hail that ravaged Tucumcari on May 27. The hailstorm impacted the city with more than \$1 million dollars in damages to municipally owned buildings as well as damage to businesses and residences.

A neon sign damage assessment by the New Mexico Route 66 Association has identified more than 60 pieces of broken neon tubing distributed among 12 classic neon signs in Tucumcari.

Tucumcari has been a favored destination of Route 66 tourists seeking to experience classic neon signage and patronize the businesses along the route. In addition to the tourism value of the neon signs, these signs are recognized by the National Park Service (NPS) as significant examples of American Folk Art. The park service has awarded previous grants to restore historic signs on Route 66 including signs in Tucumcari.

Rob Federico, owner of the Blue Swallow Motel, sounds an alarm with regard to the damaged signs. "I am afraid that if Tucumcari's neon signs are not repaired, we will see a slow demise of Route 66 tourism in Tucumcari. A lot of businesses will suffer."

Johnnie Meier, Preservation Officer for the New Mexico Route 66 Association, recognizes the problem Tucumcari faces in repairing the neon signage. "Tucumcari is isolated with regard to commercial sign companies that are capable of neon sign servicing. The closest companies that could service Tucumcari are in Amarillo, 115 miles away. For an Amarillo company to send a boom truck and a crew to Tucumcari is cost prohibitive to the family-owned small businesses in Tucumcari. Given this circumstance, the Association has committed our organization to assisting the small business owners to repair their signs with a cost-effective solution."

Melissa Lea, President of the New Mexico Route 66 Association, explains, "Upon learning of the devastation to the neon signage in Tucumcari, we initiated a Go-Fund-Me campaign for folks that want to support the Association and Tucumcari in the repair of the neon signs. Since the hailstorm, the fund has collected over \$4000 dollars with contributions continuing to be received. We have received contributions from a nationwide donor base and are now prepared to go forward with a plan."

Melissa continues, "The Association has more than 20 years' experience in leading neon restoration projects. Our Association, and our Preservation Officer have received the New Mexico Heritage Preservation Award given by the State of New Mexico for our neon project successes. In addition, the National Scenic Byways organization awarded our Association Best Practices recognition for our neon preservation work on the Route 66 Scenic Byway in New Mexico."

The Association is partnering with Connie Loveland, Executive Director of Tucumcari MainStreet, to move the neon sign project forward. Ms. Loveland has identified resources that can be invested in the project. Ms. Loveland comments, " MainStreet has had a productive relationship with the New Mexico Route 66 Association in promoting Tucumcari as a tourist destination as well as partnering on MainStreet projects. An example is the restoration of the Odeon Theater neon sign where the Association volunteered expertise, materials, and labor that resulted in relighting the sign after many years of being inoperable. Tucumcari MainStreet recognizes that heritage tourism is vital to our local economy and that the classic neon signage is vital to maintaining our position as a top tourist destination on Route 66."

Mr. Meier outlines the project plan. "The Association has performed an on-site damage assessment. At least 60 pieces of neon tubing are broken distributed among a dozen historic signs. Fabrication of the neon tubing is expected to run between \$125 to \$200 for each section depending on the complexity of the piece. If we choose \$150 a section, we'll need at least \$7500 for glass. It is expected that several burned-out high voltage transformers will need to be replaced which could push the total project cost for materials to as high as \$10,000.

What the Association plans to offer, as a free service, is to remove broken tubing, make patterns that will be used by the neon tube benders in Amarillo, to negotiate prices with the neon vendor, deliver patterns to the neon vendor, retrieve the fabricated neon tubes, and install the new tubing. We will test transformers and acquire and install replacement transformers as needed. This plan establishes a single point-of-contact to represent all the neon sign owners in Tucumcari in transactions with neon vendors. As is the case with federal grants the Association has received in the past, the Association will require up to a 50% cash or in-kind match from sign owners. The result we hope to achieve is that the sign owners would be able to have their signs restored with only the outlay of 50% of the cost of glass fabrication. It is expected that the project will require several months to complete including turnaround time for neon tube fabrication.

The Association/MainStreet project will be supported by Rob Federico and Gar Engman who have volunteered the loan of their bucket truck and Rob will volunteer as the bucket truck operator. Mr. Meier states, "I've worked with Rob and the bucket truck when we repaired the Odeon Theater sign and his passion for doing whatever he can to promote Tucumcari is an inspiration to both myself and the Association."

Having completed a preliminary damage assessment, Mr. Meier and Ms. Loveland will be personally meeting with sign owners starting the week of July 31st to identify sign owners ready to participate in the project.

Melissa Lea advises, "The Association's Go-Fund-Me neon initiative has allowed us to begin the neon restoration project. The Association is a non-profit corporation, and we operate as volunteers, no one takes a salary, including our preservation team who will be doing most of the work. We would like to invite citizens to continue to donate to the Go-Fund-Me neon campaign in order to allow us to repair as many signs as funding allows." Donations can be made online at the Association's web home page at rt66nm.org.



Attachments:

LaCitaGo: Multiple broken segments on LA CITA MEXICAN FOODS sign

Americanago: Broken segments on AMERICANA and VACANCY sign

TePeego: Nine broken segments on the TEPEE CURIOS sign

Contacts:

Johnnie Meier
Preservation Officer
New Mexico Route 66 Association
PH: 505-852-2995
e-mail: johnniev@roadsideculture.com

Melissa Beasley-Lee
President, New Mexico Route 66 Association
e-mail: president@rt66nm.org

Connie Loveland
Executive Director
Tucumcari MainStreet
Ph. 575-461-3701
e-mail: tucmainstreetdirector@gmail.com



New Mexico Route 66 Association, a 501-©3 Non-Profit. Dedicated to education, promotion, and preservation of New Mexico's Historic Route 66 Scenic Byway and economic revitalization along its 604 mile stretch throughout the state since 1989.

New Mexico Route 66 Association | 1415 Central Avenue NE
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106 | 505-803-6966
rt66nm.org | president@rt66nm.org