

How did the Orpheum Theatre Reopen After Being Closed for So Long?

“Helen Elliott approached us about a week after we moved back to town and ‘suggested’ that we get involved in the Orpheum project. Helen is very persuasive. We rolled up our sleeves and started in on the wiring, carpentry and welding before we finished unpacking.” So says George Tornga as he leans forward still lit up by his passion for the project that began for him in 2003. **Cheryl nods in agreement and recalls that at one point she suggested he just take his sleeping bag to the basement of the theater since he spent so much time there.**

George Tornga and Ken Kronebusch rewired all the lights at the ends of the chair rows. George made the handrails going up stairs to the projection room and balcony out of muffler pipe. The renovation grant said there had to be certain signs of progress—it didn’t specify the means to the desired end. Folks like George Tornga, Harold Olson, Ken Kronebusch, and John Silvernail worked hundreds of hours restoring the Orpheum to its previous glory.

The chandelier in the foyer came from France—in a box. Kit Finlayson put it together crystal-by-crystal-by-crystal. The door into the auditorium was built by Mike Brown who glued slats of wood together to make the art deco design to match that on the end of the seat rows. Ray Stoetzel created the star design in the cement out in front on the sidewalk.

The Pondera Arts Council was formed by this hard working committee as well as many others in the community to ensure that the Orpheum Theatre stays open and thriving. People come and go off the board of the PAC, but the time and effort by all is certainly appreciated!