

Effort underway to restore Malta Lodge building

by Jurri Schenck

The local Mason's Chapter called the Malta Lodge #17 is looking to restore its 115-year-old building which was built in 1905. The Lodge has done many local philanthropic charity events and they seek to do more. The effort is led by members Eric Kay and John Brooks. Currently, they are trying to raise awareness and funds that will hopefully lead them to matching grants.

Kay explained that the building has had some DIY work done over the years, but it's been 20 years since any major work has been done on it. Some of the building is still original and it needs some refurbishing.

Kay said they tried to get some grants, but that didn't work out. However, they were able to get an architect to come through and inspect the building.

The Lodge started a Go Fund Me page and set the initial amount at \$50,000 and although it will take more than that and they are going to do it a multi-phased process. They will start first with the front windows and the front facade on the north side of the building and get it cleaned up. They want the building to have more curb appeal and be more attractive.

A former master of the Lodge, Forrest Henderson, who now lives in Billings and runs a custom window company, inspected all the windows and doors and seeks to have more energy-efficient windows put in. They want to put the original sized windows back in as the year's past small windows were put in and different bricks were used to fill in the gaps. They want to create the original look on the front of the building. HVAC will be the last phase. The big things first are the windows and the electrical. The lodge room

is upstairs and is already the way it needs to be for their Lodge's function. The focus is on the first floor.

Kay said they want to host more weddings, graduation parties or other group events. They hosted a homecoming party a couple of years ago but they ran into some structural issues with 125 teenagers bouncing up and down on a 115-year-old floor. Kay said, "That got a little interesting."

Kay said, "We've got a big meeting room in the front, full kitchen. Everything needs to be redone. It will be a multiphased process. The floor does not need to be redone, we just need not have 125 bouncing teenagers on it. Structurally the architect did not have a lot of trouble with the building but the work to be done are the windows, plumbing, electrical and the kitchen."

In order for the Lodge to raise money for matching grants, Kay said, "It takes money to make money. So we want to get some money in the coffers and then pursue some of those matching grants. We have talked to Suzanne Samelson and the Downtown Project. The trick is they will have to look at what is downtown because technically we are half a block outside. Samelson said that it was super doable. They are looking at that, having a building like ours is very attractive. Once we have money in the bank, we will look at the matching grants. We raise the \$50,000 and see how far that gets us and then take it from there."

For those interested in learning more about the Malta Lodge restoration and its history, you can look them up on Facebook searching for Malta Lodge #17 AF&AM. Their fundraising page is here: <https://charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/malta-lodge-17-building-renovation/malta-lodge-17-afam>. And for a dive into their history look here: <http://www.angelfire.com/wy/malta17/ourlodge.html>



Malta Lodge #17 has sat stately on Arapahoe Street in Thermopolis since 1905. It is one of the oldest Masonic Lodges in the Big Horn Basin, and one of the oldest surviving buildings in town.