

Salem Heights Community Hall will change owners

Heritage Center to take over its operations

By Barb Curbin December 6, 2012



Salem Heights Community Hall will be given to the Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill on Dec. 13.

The nonprofit that operates the Salem Heights Community Hall has agreed to give the 101-year-old building to the Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill.

The chief condition: The heritage center must continue to operate the hall as a community center for at least 10 years. The building at 3505 Liberty Road S is rented out for club meetings, a farmers market, classes and special events.

"We're absolutely thrilled," said Kate Bayne, a board member of the Salem Heights Improvement League Inc. She and her husband,

Del, have volunteered as managers for the community center for about 14 years.

"Our board was aging off, like a lot of organizations that have been around a long time," she said. "We decided we wanted to retire gracefully, but to see if the hall could live on."

Peter Booth, executive director of the Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill, said his organization was glad to help preserve the community hall and its century-plus of tradition.

The heritage center already rents its grounds and several of its old mill buildings for weddings, club meetings and events. "We have experience doing exactly what they are doing at the community hall now," he said.

Adding the community hall to the rental inventory will provide a modest income for the heritage center, but more important, it will serve the community, Booth said.

Some rental fees may rise, but others may fall depending on the season and demand for the community center, he said.

The Salem Heights hall has been a community center since it was erected in 1911. A 1961 fire damaged the structure, but it was rebuilt. The centennial celebration in October 2011 celebrated "100 years of volunteers."

The heritage center's board checked out the old building and found it in good shape, said board president Ross Stout.

"We wanted to evaluate its condition and see if we were taking on a liability that would be costly," he said. "We learned that they have taken very good care of the building with updates and repairs."

The two boards will meet on Dec. 13 to formally transfer the building's ownership.

If the heritage center cannot make the building available to the community for 10 years, the agreement stipulates that the property will be sold and the proceeds divided between the heritage center and the Salem Community Foundation.

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