

EYES ON MILWAUKEE

Campaign Aims to Save Goldman's Sign

Group's crowdfunding campaign seeks \$20,000 to restore and display the sign.

By Jeramey Jannene - Sep 16th, 2019 03:09 pm

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Adam Levin and Jim Witkowiak pose with the Goldman's sign. Photo from Adam Levin.

The group trying to save the former Goldman's Department Store sign has the sign, an approved plan and a location.

Now all they need is the money to actually make it happen.

Adam Levin, head of the [Old Milwaukee Facebook group](#), has filed to create a tax-exempt non-profit, Old Milwaukee Neon Co., to refurbish and mount the former Goldman's sign. Weighing in 24 feet tall and 800 pounds, the sign won't be a slam dunk to reclaim. The group is seeking to raise \$20,000 [through crowdfunding platform GoFundMe](#).

Levin estimates the work will cost \$20,000 and is pursuing additional funding opportunities beyond crowdfunding. "Mounting the sign in the ground is expensive," noted Levin in an interview. The group has already received two estimates to perform the work.

Goldman's operated at 930 W. Historic Mitchell St. from 1896 until it closed in 2007. Unlike the many chains it competed against, the store was always a stand-alone enterprise.

The sign sat behind the former store before a collector purchased it and hauled the sign to North Dakota in 2015, storing it in a field. Levin crowdfunded \$2,000 in late 2017 to buy the sign back and former area alderman **Jim Witkowiak**, who owns a funeral home at [529 W. Historic Mitchell St.](#), went to pick it up. "For some reason, I just woke up one morning and said I'll go get the sign," said Witkowiak at a hearing regarding the sign's future.

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home no longer exists. The former Goldmann's building has been redeveloped into the Gerald L. Ignace Indian Health Center.

The commission unanimously approved the plan, even after learning it was, legally speaking, no longer a sign by the city's definition. "It does not qualify as a sign because you cannot advertise a business that does not exist, so therefore it is an art project," said commissioner staffer Tim Askin. He added that it's definitely historic by any definition.

Another opportunity, should it materialize, could include mounting it on a new W. Historic Mitchell St. diner proposed by John Dye. "There's a possibility, it's a long shot, that [Dye] might acquire a building on Mitchell St.," said Witkowiak in July. It would reunite it with another piece of Goldmann's history.

Dye, who owns Bryant's Cocktail Lounge, At Random and The Jazz Estate, acquired the former Goldmann's lunch counter from the owners of The Fixture Mart. But Levin would like to proceed with the rehabilitation work regardless of where on the street the sign ends up.

Should the fundraising effort fail, what's next? Levin said the sign would be donated to the American Sign Museum in Cincinnati. And even that's not a sure thing. "Their issue is the size, just like everyone else's issue with it. It's a white elephant, but still worth trying to refurbish," said Levin.

Finding new homes for old signs is a passion for Levin, and something he eventually hopes to do more effectively with the non-profit. He's already been involved in finding a new home for a painted Boston Store sign at the Milwaukee Public Market, a Prospect Mall sign now on display at Vintage tavern and part of the former Oriental Pharmacy sign which is now in storage.

The fundraising effort has already attracted \$1,100 from 24 donors.

Levin is joined as a director at the new non-profit by Witkowiak, Mary Martin and Nancy Bush.

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Goldmann's Department Store Sign



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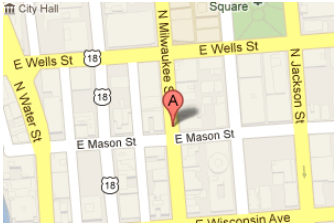
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