

For rent: Historic building has a lot to offer

Historic Building

By JONDI GUMZ
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Park Hall must be the best-kept secret in town.

Mountain Community Theater has put on productions there for 20 years, but most people don't realize the building next to the Ben Lomond Market is available to rent for parties or other activities.

Up until last year, the hall wasn't even listed in the phone book.

The people in charge of the hall want to change all that.

They are planning monthly events so more local residents become aware of this community asset.

They are thinking about building up their presence on the Web, posting the minutes of their meetings and the rental-fee schedule.

They also are talking about an ad in the Yellow Pages. And that's not cheap. An ad could cost \$111 a month, which isn't chicken feed for an entity that had less \$22,000 in income last year.

"We think this historic building has a lot to offer Ben Lomond as a whole," said Bill Pedersen, a computer consultant elected to one of the five trustee positions Tuesday night.

The other trustees are Karen Scarborough, whose husband runs a hardware business, Rick Jahn, a dentist, Ann Scott, a part-time innkeeper, and Dick Mills, who is retired.

Trustees are unpaid and serve for life, a labor of love.

"It's a really worthwhile thing to do," said Scarborough, who was elected last year.

Once a stable, the hall was given to the town in 1923 and set up as a public trust — one of only two such arrangements in the state.

The building has been run on a shoestring. Until last year, it didn't have hot water. And there isn't much money to fix the aging roof and stage. The hall either lost \$600 or made \$3,000



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Ann Scott manages Park Hall in Ben Lomond.

last year, depending on whether trustees count two rental checks that arrived after Jan. 1.

Trustees have hired an attorney to help them apply for nonprofit status, which would make it possible for supporters to make tax-deductible contributions and apply for foundation grants. It also could lower insurance premiums, which cost more than \$6,500 a year.

One bright spot is that Mountain Community Theater, the main tenant, has obtained a \$20,000 grant from the Packard Foundation to upgrade the sound system at the hall. The lighting system was improved three years ago with \$40,000 from the foundation.

The theater group had hoped to contribute toward repairs but its precarious finances makes that impossible at the moment. Members say they are willing to do a theatrical event

to help the hall financially.

Meanwhile, trustees want people to know the hall isn't just for theatrical productions. It's available for parties and classes, too. Scott, who has taken on managerial duties for \$15 an hour after doing it for six months for free, handles booking arrangements.

It's possible the hall could benefit from the demise of another group. The Ben Lomond Town Association, formed in 1987 to start the annual town party, is about to fold.

"They have \$1,000, and this would be a perfect match," Scarborough said.

To book Park Hall, call Ann Scott at 336-2278.

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