

Sign Lighting Ceremony at the Shamrock Court Motel

By Chris Winslow



Back in early January, Tom Oxler alerted the Gateway GTO officers that Roamin' Rich Dinkela had purchased the old Shamrock Court Motel. It had started life as a motel but was later converted to efficiency apartments. His plan was to restore the motel as an important piece of Route 66 history.

One of the centerpieces of the restoration of the Shamrock was commissioning a brand new neon sign for the motel. The original sign had stood on the entrance to the property from the opening of the motel in 1948 until the sign's removal in 1971. Fortunately, there were enough photos of it still in existence to have a precise replica of the old neon sign fabricated. This was, of course, an expensive sign to make, so Tom suggested that we consider a fund raising effort for the sign, much like we did last year for the new awnings on the Pontiac Museum.

As everyone now knows, we presented this to the membership both via email and also at our March meeting and Gateway's members stepped up in a big way. More on that later.

Roamin' Rich scheduled the sign lighting ceremony for Saturday March 19th. For those of us that wanted to attend the lighting in person, the Oxler's organized a dinner in advance of the event. The dinner was at the Du Kum Inn in Sullivan.

The weather was really nice and there had been a decent amount of rain a few days earlier that had washed away (hopefully) the last of the salt for the winter. That convinced many

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of us to break out the GTOs for the event.

The restaurant had set up a table for all 16 of us that had made the trip.

After a great dinner, we headed over to the Shamrock. There was already quite a crowd there when we arrived but they did manage to squeeze in the classic GTOs near the motel. This included a special spot for Earl next to the motel itself.





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They had the event set up sort of like an open house where they had most of the motel rooms open so that the visitors could take a self guided tour. They also had a 50/50 and a silent auction underway as well as a dessert room set up. The silent auction was for a metal sign that had once hung on the building.



The original exterior stonework on the building appeared to be in remarkably good condition and with a new roof and repairs made to the gables and dormers, Rich already has the outside of the building looking really good.

In keeping with the Irish theme for the motel, there was even a leprechaun roaming the grounds.

The sun was still up when we first arrived so we all got a chance to get a good look at the new neon sign in the daylight and it looked amazing. (Probably better than the



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original sign did when it was new!)

As anticipation of the lighting ceremony grew, Rich jumped up on the roof of his truck and gave the growing crowd an overview of his plans for the restoration of the motel. All of us there agreed that there is a lot of work ahead of Rich, but he is off to a great start.

As the sun began to set, we all gathered again at Rich's truck for the final announcements before the lighting of the sign and the building. Two of those announcements were check presentations in support of the project. The first presentation was made by the Route 66 Preservation Society. As they were making their presentation I was really hoping it was not going to be as much as what Gateway had pulled together, so the suspense was killing me as they presented Rich with a check for \$1000 towards the project. I breathed a sigh of relief because I knew Gateway had beat that amount.

With my turn next, I presented Rich with a check for our donation of \$1025. A few minutes after that, it was time to turn on the lights. There was a huge cheer from the crowd as



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the building and the sign were lit. What had not been visible in the daylight on the building was green accent lighting on the outline of the roof. From what Tom Oxler told us, the accent lighting was actually LED, but it looked just like neon. The sign, which is neon, also looked amazing. All of us that attended are looking forward to seeing this project completed and staying a night or two in the motel when it opens for business.



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