

A Business Fire Tests the Power of Family

Portland, OR -- A kitchen fire that forced the closure of Portland's East Bank Saloon created a defining moment in the lives of owners, Connie and Robert "Pudgy" Hunt. For more than 33 years the Hunt's popular sports bar, located at 727 S. E. Grand Avenue, has been a east side neighborhood icon. After the devastating fire the decision was, "Do we rebuild and re-open, or close this chapter of our lives and walk away?"

On September 30, a stovetop grease fire accelerated into the ventilation hood. The fire suppression system activated and quickly extinguished the fire before emergency crews even arrived. But the damage had already been done.

The kitchen appliances, grills, deep fryer and worktables were all a loss. Worse yet, when the suppression system activated, it created a thick, sticky fog that blanketed the entire restaurant. Everything in the restaurant from plates and pitchers, to artwork and trophies, were covered in a greasy residue.

"After the unfortunate fire, it might have been easier to close the doors in this economy," said co-owner Connie Hunt. "But our family has a profound commitment to the east side community and to the greater Portland business community." Many long time Oregonians know Pudgy Hunt, as the Oregon Sports Hall of Fame inductee who held the record for the highest scoring high school basketball game (1957). The record was broken 50 years later by Kevin Love. Connie Hunt is also an active community leader and former officer in the city and state hospitality industry.

Rebuilding and re-opening was a family decision and a family project. "Our two sons, Kevin and David, grew up working with us in the restaurant and are the current managers." According to Connie Hunt. "However, Pudgy and I had not been active in the business for some time." But when the fire threatened the loss of their family business as well as their family history, the Hunt's made the difficult decision

to do whatever it took as a family to bring the East Bank Saloon back into the lives of so many friends and customers.

With the decision to re-open made, the Hunt family turned to general contractor Cooper Construction Company, another locally owned family business that specializes in fire and smoke damage. The prominent fire, water, smoke and storm damage restoration company is owned by Robert and Judy Ramsour and has been in business since 1950.

Cooper Construction Company project manager Mike White says, “Not only did we have to facilitate a complete kitchen replacement including the floors and walls, but every table, chair, window and door had to be cleaned and restored.” White says the project took more than a month with the aid of additional specialty contractors including Don Frank Floors, Watson Plumbing and Squires Electric.

Bringing the building’s old character back to life was an exacting task. The building itself is in the historic Portland West Block and registered as a national historic landmark. According to White, “We needed to preserve and protect that history during the renovation.” The preservation process also included returning the floors to their original surface.

“We are committed to this neighborhood. We are committed to this city,” Connie Hunt said. “Even in this economy and with the issues businesses and families face, we will work mightily to stay a part of this community.” And just to prove how mightily Connie will work, now that the restaurant is freshly open, she is back waiting tables herself on Thursdays and Fridays. She says, “It will be good to see ‘the regulars’, I’ve missed that.”

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A fire at the popular East Bank Saloon damaged the kitchen and spread a greasy residue throughout the restaurant.





General Contractor, Cooper Construction Company was hired to manage the restoration of the East Bank Saloon, including a complete kitchen replacement.