

# WACF praises community effort in Goss restoration

*As 2019 winds down, so does the Watertown Area Community Foundation's "40 Stories for 40 Years." It is with that in mind, as well as the community-minded people who made the Foundation what it is today, that we feel it fitting to pay homage to more organizations and efforts that say 'community.' One example of that is the Friends of the Goss Opera House.*

**By Julianne Endres**  
Watertown Area Community Foundation

One hundred and thirty years ago Charles Goss rebuilt the Goss Opera House after a fire destroyed it. The Watertown community supported him and the GOH so much so that his obituary in a 1905 Watertown

Public Opinion read: "He will long be remembered in Watertown... He helped to build Watertown and in death he leaves many a good friend who will remember him only in a kind and generous way."

The Friends of the Goss Opera House (FOG) continues to carry that torch as the Goss Opera House is being "rebuilt" yet again with community support lighting the way. Friends of the Goss is officially made up of an 11-member Board of Directors, a steering committee, campaign co-chairs (honorary and acting), and Executive Director Missy Sinner.

In recent months, however, Friends of the Goss has evolved to encompass many more. From an

initial group of Watertownians who desired to keep the Goss doors open several years ago, to the establishing Friends of the Goss as a nonprofit, to several committees, to numerous area contractors, to individuals, businesses and organizations donating their time and dollars, to Lake Area Technical Institute students...the list goes on.

Support of the Watertown Area Community Foundation helped lead the effort, FOG said. The foundation awarded a \$150,000 grant in 2018, which helped FOG purchase the building.



Courtesy photo

One aspect of the renovation of the Goss Opera House is to repair peeling walls and restore its decorative artwork.



"The foundation and (Watertown) development company's support have made a big difference," said Milt Carter, FOG president. "That support has motivated people to do something. As far as the fundraising goes, I had no idea what to expect. It's so encouraging."

Campaign goals are being met and that prompts renovation milestones to be met.

Perhaps the fundraising success is partially due to Watertown area residents' voices being heard.

"Revitalizing downtown Watertown has been on the minds of our citizens for quite some time," said Don Roby, who together with his wife, Kelly, and Jeff and Paula Orthaus, co-chair the Light Up the Goss Fundraising Campaign. "This was clearly evident during the H2O-20 Visioning process."

In November, the Goss got another positive boost. It was announced that a WACF anonymous donor will match \$250,000 of FOG donations through Dec. 31, 2019. To date, \$130,000 has been raised toward the challenge.

"We hope to meet that match and check another essential thing off our list," said Carter.



The FOG checklist shows many accomplishments thus far. The Goss logo, designed by a Watertown native, was completed early on and features three 'jeweled' points, paying tribute to the three opera houses in Watertown during Goss's time. The roof is done. The windows are done. Insulation of all exterior walls are near completion and when they are, LATI students will begin the dry wall process.

The opera hall is an extraordinary project all its own with a designated committee of local designers, historians and other volunteers taking the reins. Once the plaster cracks are repaired in the opera hall, painting the hall will begin. Patching, sanding and refinishing the floor was more expensive than replacing it, so the floor will be replaced. The good original planks will be repurposed as much as possible elsewhere in the Goss.

Installation of a sound system, curtains and acoustical treatments will proceed after the floor is completed.

"If we raise the money needed, we hope to have everything done by the time the restaurant opens," Carter said. "Mavericks is fully engaged. They're working on plans with a potential opening in spring 2020."

The restaurant will join other renters as

all but of the Goss' business locations has been filled with offices, retail and a dance studio.

"Tangible results like the building are one aspect," said FOG Board member Kristen Henderson regarding progress to date. "But it's also exciting to see how the Goss has really become a community project. That's been evident with the amount of money raised, support on social media and so much more."

Sinner noted the strong community support.

"We see people in the community stand up to the occasional nay-sayer whether in public or on social media and that's so positive," she said. "And we can't say enough about the army of people in the shadows who are helping. They've spent hours and hours on the Goss."

Carter said the community support has helped him believe the entire project is going to become a reality.

"After months of planning, kicking off a fundraising campaign, renovating, hiring Sinner as executive director, more planning and more fund-raising, this December, the vision is becoming reality," he said. "Next December, FOG fully intends the Goss to be a bustle of activity with every window lit up, not just with lights but with life."

A New Year's Eve party may have to be added to the list.

"Just like the community foundation is supported by people of all walks of life, the goal of opening the Goss Opera House is to have a gathering place for people from all walks of life," said Chris Carter. "The mission is a broad cross section of events, both private and public."

Events are already being booked. The South Dakota Symphony Chamber Orchestra will be welcomed at the Goss for a concert on April 24 next year.

"The foundation's support of the Goss is about supporting the arts, entertainment, historic preservation and downtown revitalization, but perhaps most importantly, it's about community," said Jan DeBerg, WACF executive director.

Milt and Chris Carter said there are many interesting places on the map, but they feel fortunate and blessed to have grown up and raised their family in Watertown.

"The Goss, too, is a place," Chris said. "But the people are what make the place."

