

LOCAL

See historic Billy Bud chimney sweep at Sheboygan County Museum over Labor Day weekend

'As long as we own the property, we're going to take good care of Billy,' Dan Fosdick, vice president of Heartland Properties, said.



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SHEBOYGAN – The beloved Billy Bud statue will be on display at the Sheboygan County Museum, 3110 Erie Ave., before returning atop the Henry Jung Apartments.

The chimney sweep was taken down last fall from a smokestack at the former Jung Shoe Company building, 620 N. Eighth St., because it was in poor condition and at risk of collapsing.

Billy Bud underwent restoration from local artist and designer Craig Grabhorn, South High art teacher Brian Sommersberger and students.

“The Sheboygan County Museum is excited to host the Billy Bud sculpture,” said Brett Lobello, executive director of the Sheboygan County Museum. “It's an honor to showcase this unique facet of Sheboygan history that is so often seen from afar.”

Free museum admission to see Billy Bud up close

Billy Bud will be showcased during the “Plank Road Rendezvous,” which explores the period of exchange among Native Americans, fur traders and pioneers during the fur trade. Scavenger hunts, reenactments and demonstrations will be included.

Dan Fosdick, vice president of Heartland Properties, Inc., which owns the apartments, said an exhibit of the restoration process, history and more will accompany the statue.

Bud will be on display 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Aug. 30-31 and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sept. 1. Admission is free to visit the museum and see the statue.

Chimney sweep commissioned for apartment redevelopment in 1990s

Billy Bud is a 6-foot, 5-inch statue made from stainless steel, fiber glass and plaster. He sat atop the smokestack since 1992 when the Alexander Company redeveloped the Jung Shoe Co. building to apartments. The company occupied the space for more than 70 years.

Former University of Wisconsin-Platteville art professor Bud Wall was commissioned to create the statue.

Statue will be monitored for future restoration

Fosdick said the smokestack was shortened from 90 feet to 50 feet, although initial plans called for complete demolition. Mortar deteriorated above 50 feet, but construction crews found it was stable below that.

“It's not going to be quite as prominent as 90 feet, but still at 50 feet, if you're on Eighth Street and beyond, you can see Billy,” Fosdick said.

Fosdick is confident Billy Bud's longevity will be supported by more structural integrity from the shortened smokestack. Still, he said conditions will be monitored.

The artists estimate the statue wouldn't need restoration for the next 20 to 30 years, he added.

~~**Apartments on historic store land:** J.J. Koepsell was a plumbing wholesaler for years on Sheboygan's riverfront. Today, its former site is home to a future apartment complex.~~

“As long as we own the property, we're going to take good care of Billy Bud,” Fosdick said.

Heartland paid around \$20,000 for Billy Bud's restoration, transportation and removal and reinstallation on the smokestack, according to Fosdick.

Fosdick said the company didn't set out to restore the statue but determined it was worth trying to get Billy Bud “back to his former glory” after artists assessed his conditions.

Return to Henry Jung Apartments expected after Labor Day

Billy Bud's expected return to the smokestack will be Labor Day week. A letter from Heartland shared at a Historic Preservation Commission last year projected he could've returned to the smokestack by that winter.

Property owner isn't seeking historical status for statue, smokestack

The Jung Shoe Co. building was added to the state and national registers of historic places in the early 1990s. Billy Bud was added after, excluding him from the historical preservation status.

Last fall, the Historical Preservation Commission and Heartland Properties disagreed on who had jurisdiction over the building, including the smokestack. The commission believed the smokestack was integral to the building's historical integrity and needed further consideration before demolition.

Heartland disagreed, seeking teardown to prevent a safety hazard and avoid up to \$1 million in restoration costs.

“It was always our contention that the smokestack was not within their (the Commission's) jurisdiction and that we needed to do what we needed to do,” Fosdick said.

He said Heartland is not seeking preservation status for Billy Bud or the smokestack.

Fosdick said, “We're going to abide by whatever state or local statutes as it relates to the apartment building, but if something's in disrepair or is going to impact the safety of the public, as was such the case with the smokestack, then we're going to do what we need to to protect the general public and our residents.”

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