

Against the odds... Survivors  
in  
**Our Valley**



**Mail Tribune**

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# The Neverending story

The owners of Ashland's grandest landmark admit that their hotel has weathered a torrent of difficulties.

But rather than cover up the nearly 80-year history of the Ashland Springs Hotel (its latest name and incarnation), Doug and Becky Neuman have glorified it.

"We just wanted to go right back to the past," said owner Becky Neuman.

Upon purchasing the hotel, the Neumans were enchanted by its sturdy yet elegant construction, particularly the spacious lobby where light pours through original stained glass windows "like melted butter."

"It was all right there. ... It was just kind of crying out to be loved again," Neuman said.

The Lithia Springs Hotel — also called the Lithia Hotel — was built in 1925, a year before the passenger railroad changed its route to go through Klamath Falls, no longer stopping in Ashland. The Great Depression hit a few years later.

As the hotel changed hands, the building went through various remodeling phases according to decorating trends of the day.

The 1960s ushered in modern interiors, including lower ceilings that masked ornately carved beams, cheap carpeting covering marble mosaic floors, and Formica and chrome that replaced original furnishings.

In 1960, the Lithia Springs became the Mark Antony with a Tudor theme to mirror the growing popularity of the Oregon Shakespeare

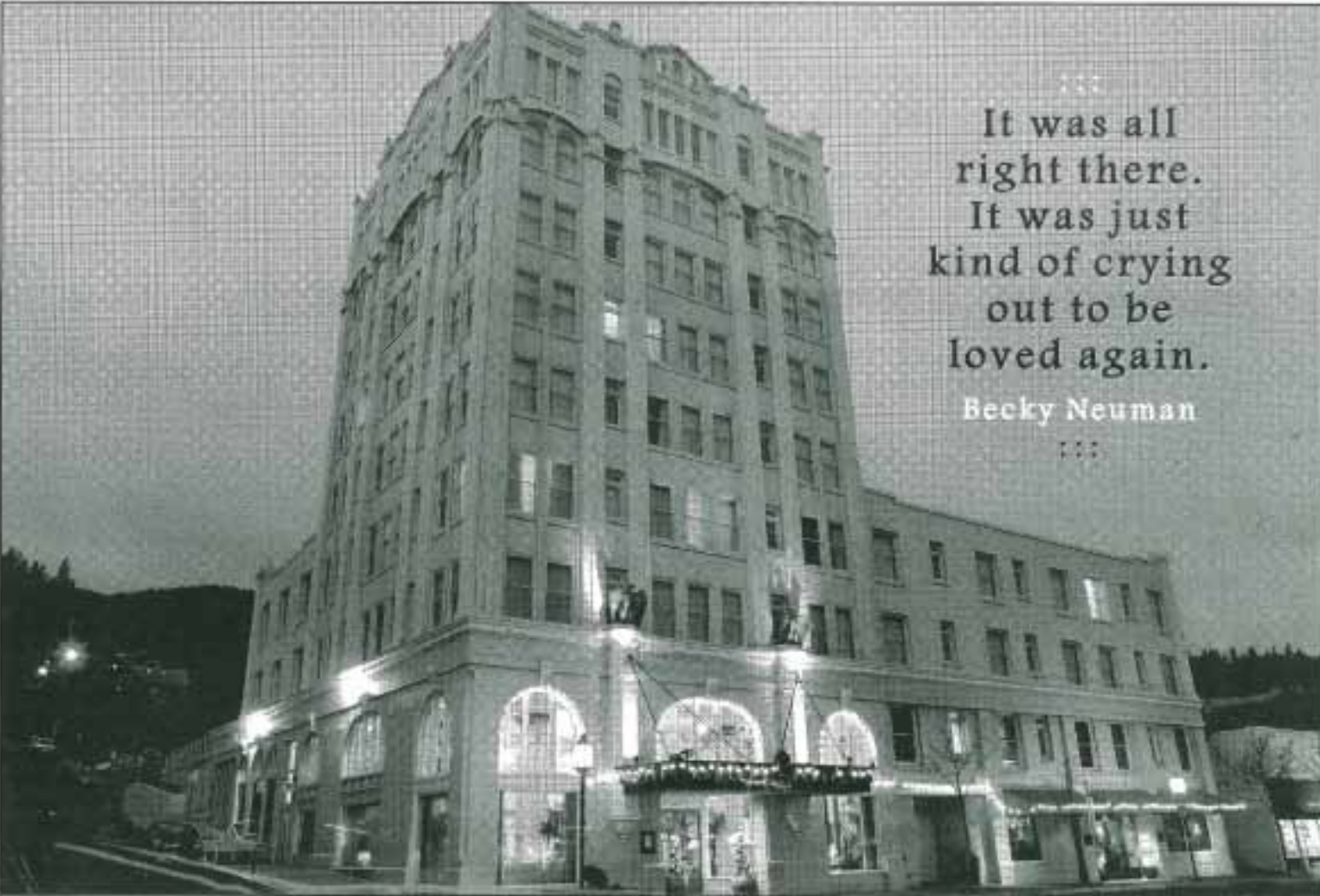
Festival. The hotel was again refurbished, and a swimming pool was built. But guests gradually declined in number as motels became popular tourist lodging.

By the 1970s, the "Mark" had a reputation as a flophouse of cheap rooms and apartments when Karsten Arriens purchased it and undertook a massive renovation.

The five-year project, which removed false ceilings and brought the structure into compliance with fire codes bankrupted Arriens in 1982.

BY SARAH LEMON : MAIL TRIBUNE

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## : Focus :



**A**shland Springs' owners, Doug and Becky Neuman, sought to furnish the 1925 hotel — purchased in 1998 — with a turn-of-the-century elegance.

The former Lithia Springs Hotel opened before the conception of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, when Ashland's main attractions were mineral water cures and Chatauqua lectures, a popular educational movement.

Ashland was then a destination to nourish the mind, body and spirit, according to Becky Neuman. Travelers of the age also were avid

collectors of flora and fauna, she said.

Designers installed curio cabinets filled with stuffed birds, seashells and plant specimens in the hotel lobby to reflect the era's emerging consciousness of naturalism. Visitors are intrigued by these "collections of curious things," Neuman said.

Retaining the hotel's roots has contributed to its success where the former Mark Antony with its Shakespearean theme failed, the Neumans said. Since its reincarnation as the Ashland Sprigs, the hotel has been featured in design magazines, including Architectural Digest.



Setsuki Doi (left), Matthew D'Arenzo (opposite page and above) : for the Mail Tribune

With a multitude of windows facing various directions, available light — both natural and electric — helps dramatize the effects of the period interior design at the Ashland Springs Hotel. Owner Becky Neuman says that daylight can pour into the lobby (shown in both photos above) "like melted butter."



To evoke the turn of the century's emerging naturalism, designers installed curio cabinets filled with stuffed birds, seashells and plant specimens. These "collections of curious things" give the Ashland Springs' lobby a visual interest lacking in many modern hotels.

Matthew D'Annunzio for the Mail Tribune

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The "Mark" continued to operate under various owners and managers, but even after several remodels was yet in dire need of major renovation. Although the building was furnished with antiques, the plaster was peeling and the ceilings leaked, said Sandra Slattery, executive director of the Ashland Chamber of Commerce. Visitors must have felt that the shabby hotel once again could be beautiful if only the right person would fix it up, she added.

Holding a personal fondness for the old hotel, developer Doug Neuman was disturbed by a rumor that the once-grand landmark might end its days as a retirement home. He sold other promising Rogue Valley properties to buy the "Mark" at a bankruptcy auction in 1996, christening it the Ashland Springs

Hotel. The Neumans also purchased the historic resort at Lake of the Woods. Both purchases came after Doug Neuman's source of investment capital declared bankruptcy facing fraud charges.

Where the Mark Antony's Shakespearean theme failed, the Neumans said they have succeeded by nurturing the hotel's roots and carrying out a complete renovation, which lasted about two years at the cost of approximately \$10 million.

"Our team just dug so deep," said Becky Neuman.

While Doug Neuman's work crews stripped the hotel to its bare bones, his wife set about furnishing the hotel with a turn-of-the-century elegance harkening back to the popularity of mineral water cures and Chatauqua lectures.

"(Ashland) was sort of a mind, body,

spirit destination," Becky Neuman said.

To evoke the era's emerging naturalism, designers installed curio cabinets filled with stuffed birds, seashells and plant specimens. These "collections of curious things" give the Ashland Springs' lobby a visual interest lacking in many modern hotels, Neuman said.

Framed vintage Rogue Valley postcards decorated with pressed flowers adorn the halls and, each of the hotel's 70 guest rooms takes its theme from French herb lore. Apricot, melon and other fresh colors lend a spa feeling to the interior, urging guests to relax.

Billing the Ashland Springs as an accessible oasis is one way manager Mary Arnstad hopes to attract more local residents in the hotel's off season. The hotel also has garnered

more guests with holiday promotions, wedding packages and community partnerships, she said. In a new scheme this year, the hotel will support the Ashland Independent Film Festival with a portion of proceeds from each room rented by festival-goers, Arnstad said.

But even if some Southern Oregonians never spend a night in the hotel, the Neumans gave the Rogue Valley back one of its most beloved landmarks.

"Clearly, it's a showpiece of our downtown, and one the community can be proud of," Slattery said.

"It's wonderful to do something that's connected to some grander scheme," Becky Neuman said.

"It's part of the Ashland dream."

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## THE SALVATION ARMY IN JACKSON COUNTY

Though known primarily for its work at Christmas and its Thrift Stores, The Salvation Army is always busy working in this community every day of the year. Restoration and regeneration of human lives is the goal of The Salvation Army church and shelter, family service office and after school club. People are our daily focus, and the love of God is our daily bread.

### Thrift Stores:

Salvation Army Thrift Stores provide reasonably priced household and clothing items that benefit the public, and provide financial support to the Army's programs.

The Thrift Stores also provide a place for people to build life skills through vocational training. The Thrift Stores and warehouse are also excellent places for volunteers and Army program participants to learn basic work ethic while helping others.



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