

RIO SIESTA RESCUE

Photos by Jerry McClanahan and Carol Duncan

On September 25th of 2014, a hardy group of volunteers, including Route 66 authors and authorities Jim Ross and Jerry McClanahan, and Justin Booher, President of Vital Outdoors in Edmond, OK, headed out to Elk City Oklahoma.

Their mission: rescue the damaged and faded neon sign from Clinton Oklahoma's former Rio Siesta Motel for future restoration and eventual inclusion in the Billboard Museum currently under development for Oklahoma's section of Route 66.

There they met Don Mullenix and Carol Duncan (both inducted into the Oklahoma Route 66 Hall of Fame) in Elk City at the site where the forlorn sign had been in storage.

This once grand and eye catching neon sign (as seen in the photo at the right) was torn down years ago. Don, and other volunteers, dragged the derelict neon sign off a rubbish heap. Frequent Route 66 volunteer Carol Duncan started a fundraising campaign to restore it and the dollars raised have been resting with the Oklahoma 66 Association. Stored on property owned by Mullenix, the sign has been donated by the Oklahoma Route 66 Association to the Billboard Museum.

The team muscled the heavy and awkwardly shaped pieces of the large, complex sign onto the trailer, and trucked it to temporary storage in Oklahoma City, where they were met by Kathy Anderson, President and Jim Gleason, Vice President, of the Billboard Museum's board of directors (the aforementioned Justin Booher is the Museum's Volunteer Coordinator).

Kathy Anderson is a past president of the Oklahoma Route 66 Association and also a member of the Oklahoma Route 66 Hall of Fame. Jim is a second-generation sign maker, as well as a sign-industry consultant and sales/design manager for Superior Neon Signs in Oklahoma City.

Kathy, who initiated the idea of the Museum, says that from the very beginning the need to provide a home and hopefully restoration for the Rio Siesta sign has been a key component.

The Rio Siesta sign, although badly damaged and missing its stereotypical slumbering Mexican, which will have to be built from scratch, is now in good company with other rescued signs awaiting display, such as the former message sign from Oklahoma City's Taft Stadium, once located on May Street/Route 66. Besides honoring billboards, the museum, when complete, will feature all aspects of roadside advertising.



The Rio Siesta Motel sign in its latter days, faded but still standing proud in this 1983 photo. Notice "STORM CELLAR."



Jerry realizes he might need a LITTLE help.



Kathy Anderson and Jim Gleason surveying the ravages of time.



It took 4 strong guys to wrestle the bigger sections onto the trailer.



Volunteers, Justin Booher and Carol Duncan.



Don Mullenix, the sign's rescuer and caretaker while in storage.



Jim says "stop taking photos and help!"

The Museum is currently fund raising and looking for a suitable spot along Route 66 near Oklahoma City to acquire and build upon.

The Billboard Museum Association, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, was formally organized in 2013. Quoting from the Museum's website:

"The Museum will consist of two venues. First will be an outdoor driving loop with vintage billboard structures, matching vintage or reproduction ads, and other signs. The one-way road will be built to the standards used for the famous 9'-wide "sidewalk" highway located on old Route 66 in the northeastern part of Oklahoma. The billboard structures themselves varied over time and showcasing the various styles/eras is just as important to the experience as the art on the boards. Billboards with projections, lights, 3-D elements, motion, and other effects are known in the business as "Spectaculars" and we will include these, too.

"The second venue will be an indoor museum with a variety of exhibits ranging from the history of billboards and the scenic-vs "sign-ic" debates to telling the stories of the artists who painted them by hand as well as how billboards have been depicted in movies and on television. Initially we will recreate a fictitious Route 66 Main Street community at dusk, complete with store fronts, billboards, and area signs rescued from destruction. We will add other exhibits over time and as expenses allow."

Go to their website for further info and how to join: <http://billboardmuseum.org>.

Special thanks to John Hargrove of Arcadia, OK for the loan of his long, long trailer. 🚚
