

Foundation working to preserve Camano City Schoolhouse

By Kari Bray Herald Writer

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CAMANO ISLAND LOCAL NEWS

CAMANO ISLAND — The little white building, tucked among the trees near Camano Island’s west coast, went up in an era when Washington cities were defined by railroad tracks and waterways.

The Camano City Schoolhouse was added to the Washington Heritage Register of Historic Places in June. It’s the latest victory for the [Camano Schoolhouse Foundation](#), a grassroots group of island history buffs aiming to restore the schoolhouse and preserve the history of Camano City.

When the schoolhouse was built around 1905, Camano City was a small but flourishing community with a hotel, general store, several shingle mills, a post office, a busy logging industry and direct access to important Washington boat routes.

But by the 1920s, the bustle of Camano City started to slow. The schoolhouse remained open until the mid-1930s, then began to fade into the tranquil, woody backdrop of the island.

More than 70 years later, Jim Turk learned that the “sturdy little building” he could see from his house up the hill was a classic one-room schoolhouse. Turk, a history lover and Camano resident at the time, decided something needed to be done to restore the schoolhouse. He rallied a handful of

volunteers and formed the Camano Schoolhouse Foundation, which operates under the Island County Historical Society but is working on becoming a separate nonprofit.

“Talk about building from the ground up,” said Chuck Durland, the foundation’s development director. “He had this vision for saving the schoolhouse and creating this community gathering place and preserving the history of Camano Island.”

The foundation purchased the schoolhouse and half an acre of land for \$60,000 in 2012 from Camano Island Fire & Rescue, which owns an auxiliary station next to the schoolhouse.

Since the purchase, they’ve been working on renovating the schoolhouse to make it usable year-round as a community event space. While there are historical items on display and information on the walls, Turk and Durland said they don’t want to create a museum.

By 2020, the group aims to establish a Camano City Schoolhouse Heritage Education Center where people can host presentations and meetings or put on picnics and weddings, all in a historic setting.

“Our idea is to re-create in the schoolhouse the ambiance of that early schoolhouse era,” Turk said.

So far, they’ve cleaned the roof, put on new gutters, fixed the restrooms and stabilized the building with repair work in the basement. The group plans to put a fresh coat of white paint on the schoolhouse before the summer’s out.

In the future, Durland said they hope to redo the floor, get a new water heater, install better lighting, put storm windows on the inside of the building and replace a wheelchair ramp.

The most pressing need right now, though, is an energy-efficient heating system, which they’ve estimated would cost \$10,000. Without heat, the schoolhouse can’t be used in the winter.

“We need to put all of our efforts into getting this space useable yearround,” Durland said. “We’re kind of singleminded in that right now.”

They've had help from fellow board member Don Hopkins and from local business owners, including donated gutters from Ron Moore's Gutter Factory, paint from Christie Connors of the Stanwood Camano Community Resource Center, lumber from Evan Holzknecht of Cascade Lumber and signs from local artist Mary McIntyre.

As restoration efforts continue, the group also hopes to pay off its \$60,000 mortgage long before the Dec. 15, 2022, end date.

Durland and Turk expect the historic register designation to help with fundraising and grant applications.

"The Camano City School is historically significant as an intact example of an early one-room school house, directly linked to the early educational system of Washington State," wrote Allyson Brooks, a historic preservation officer with the state, in a letter to Turk.

Being on the state register can help organizations get property tax deductions for historic sites along with code waivers to protect the integrity of the building during renovations, Brooks wrote.

"As a very small group, we've been struggling with all manner of fundraisers to keep up with maintenance and upkeep," Turk said. "Every month, we struggle with do we or don't we have enough to pay the bills."

He estimates the monthly costs are about \$700 for mortgage, utilities and insurance.

"Starting an organization from scratch is like getting a big ship going, or a train, it takes a lot of power to get it going," Durland said. "We feel like we're just getting it going."

The group's next scheduled fundraiser is its second annual Heritage Preservation Award and Camano Schoolhouse Foundation Benefit Breakfast. The event is set for Oct. 9 at 8 a.m. in the [Cama Center at Cama Beach State Park](#). The foundation plans to honor Carol Triplett, co-chair of the [Friends of Camano Island Parks](#), for her dedication to preserving parks, trails and historic sites on Camano Island, including Cama Beach.

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