

The People and City of Allegan for the Rehabilitation of the Regent Theatre

The Art Deco-style Regent Theatre was originally built as a horse livery. In 1919 it became a theater, showing movies and live vaudeville stage acts. During the 1930s, the Regent received an Art Deco facelift, including a cream-colored vitrolite Façade with red and green highlights. The six second-story windows have been closed up and covered with vitrolite with abstract decoration on them. The late Streamline era marquee is lit with neon and light bulbs.

Public outcry and donations from all corners of the community saved the theater when it was threatened with demolition in 1990. The nonprofit Old Regent Theatre Company purchased and restored the theater's interior to its 1930s grandeur, celebrating a grand reopening in 1996. A year later the roof collapsed during a violent thunderstorm, and the theatre was threatened with demolition once again. The Old Regent Theatre Company was again able to raise money locally to rebuild the theater and preserve this very important community institution. The efforts to preserve and maintain the Regent Theatre have involved numerous independent citizens from throughout the community donating their time and effort to complete much of the necessary restoration work over the years, whether by cleaning up debris following the collapse of the roof or restoring the historic theater seating.

The city of Allegan eventually took ownership of the building in order to preserve it and return it to service as a focal point of the community. Since then, the Regent has been painstakingly rebuilt and restored once again, including recreating historic panels in the auditorium and the original 1930s carpeting. The building was rewired electrically, and new curtains were hung. The 20 x 30 foot original screen was salvaged, but needed repair. Throughout the next 12 years additional work was completed, culminating in the relighting of the marquee, restored by Ian Macartney of Neon Americana/Lumichron of Grand Rapids. In 2007 the marquee glowed once again as theatergoers filled the seats for the grandest opening yet. The continued preservation of this key cultural institution in the Allegan community has meant that an important physical piece of the shared history of the community has been preserved for the benefit of current residents and for future members of the community to share as well.

