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Contact: Alyssa Starelli, VP
Atomic Age Alliance -- Portland
alyssa@aaapdx.org
503.888.1364



Crown Motel. Photo Credit: Vintage Roadside

Coalition Forming to Save Interstate Neon — Site Sought for Crown Motel Sign Relocation

PORTLAND, ORE — Recent controversy surrounding the possible loss of the 1959-vintage Crown Motel sign on N. Interstate Avenue is generating a passionate response from a growing coalition of organizations, businesses, and neighborhood groups. Led by the Atomic Age Alliance of Portland (www.aaapdx.org), a local non-profit organization dedicated to mid-century design and architecture, this coalition is organizing efforts to save the Crown Motel sign and helping to generate guidelines and protections for the rest of N. Interstate's unique collection of mid-century roadside neon signs.

*"It's a great way to carry the history of
Interstate into its next incarnation preserving, or even
enhancing, its uniqueness."*

Eric Gale, Overlook Neighborhood Association Chair

Signs of the Times

Local iconic signs like the Palms Motel and Alibi Lounge are just two examples of the distinctive neon designs remaining on N. Interstate Avenue from its heyday in the 1940s, '50s and early '60s when it was the primary north-south route between Portland and Seattle. Today, these landmarks define and give character to a street and neighborhood being reborn through the impact of TriMet's Interstate MAX Line and the city's Interstate Urban Renewal Corridor. Preserving and maintaining these classic signs, more than eight of which dot N. Interstate along the 25 blocks between N. Failing and N. Dekum, is viewed by many as a critical step, embracing and enhancing the neighborhood's history and identity.

Crown Motel Sign Needs New Home

The Atomic Age Alliance's immediate goal is to rally interested businesses, groups, and community members to help save, relocate, and restore the Crown Motel sign somewhere along "motel row." AAA-PDX is collaborating with staff from the city's planning and development agencies to identify a site that meets necessary criteria. The coalition is asking property owners along N. Interstate Avenue from N. Overlook to N. Russet to consider whether their properties might serve as a new home for the restored (and possibly re-purposed) sign. "Potential locations might be a commercial site, an unimproved lot or a parking area," says Alyssa Starelli, AAA-PDX vice-president. "Our hope is to find a site prior to March 15th, when REACH will be demolishing the motel for a new low-income housing project. If a site cannot be located, the sign may be lost." Sign dimensions are available at www.aaapdx.org.

Anyone with prospective sites is asked to submit them by email to crownmotel@aaapdx.org. Contact the same address with questions or to learn more about restoration fundraising and sponsorship opportunities.

"We see N. Interstate's neon signs as irreplaceable assets — not only for the Overlook and Arbor Lodge neighborhoods, but for all Portlanders. Rejuvenation is encouraging local businesses to join with city agencies, neighborhood groups, and members of the community to find ways to protect these signs as N. Interstate grows and changes."

Alysa Rose, President, Rejuvenation



Western Motel. Photo Credit: Vintage Roadside

Where is N. Interstate Heading?

Beyond efforts to save the Crown Motel sign, the AAA-PDX coalition will work with members of the city's planning and development agencies to help craft a vision and framework for preserving N. Interstate's remaining neon signs for generations to come. More information can be found at www.aaapdx.org.

About the Atomic Age Alliance of Portland (AAA-PDX)

The Atomic Age Alliance of Portland is a non-profit volunteer organization dedicated to celebrating historic mid-century modern design, signage, architecture, culture, and business through ongoing advocacy, activism, and educational programs. From the designs of renowned builders and architects such as Rummer, Berkemeier, Oakland, Weber, and Yeon, to the understated tracts of ranch houses in Cliffgate and Beaverton, Portland has an impressive variety of mid-century architecture. AAA-PDX was formed to call attention to this often overlooked “Atomic Age” era.

Through community advocacy, activism, and education, AAA-PDX’s goal is to increase understanding and appreciation of postwar (1940s-1960s) architecture and design. Its website (www.aaapdx.org) is growing, with plans to include a Top 20 list of Portland-area mid-century homes, commercial buildings, neighborhoods, and vintage signs; discussion forums and a newsletter; and historical information designed to help explain and celebrate the importance of this era. Other planned features include resources for postwar homeowners and a “Flippers’ Manual” aimed at educating remodelers about the importance of “outdated” yet original elements that will help properties retain character and add value.

Founded in 2007, AAA-PDX already boasts nearly 50 members from all walks of life, united in a shared appreciation of mid-century culture. The group meets monthly at The Alibi Restaurant & Lounge, and welcomes new members. Visit AAA-PDX online: www.aaapdx.org

Photos Available for use:

Westerner: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/11339606@N07/2188501470/>

Crown: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/11339606@N07/2150489181/>

High-resolution images of the AAA-PDX logo and examples of Portland midcentury design are available upon request.