

Hunt Brothers giving grandfather's store a facelift



By Mark McComas

Renovations to the L.O. Hunt store in Cottageville are nearing completion. Hunt's grandsons, Brad and Bruce, are turning the old store into a woodworking shop.

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Cottageville, W.Va. -

Grandsons of the late L.O. Hunt have been giving his old store building in the middle of Cottageville a facelift.

Brad and Bruce Hunt, sons of Dorothy and the late Alvin Hunt of Ripley, have been working weekends and even holidays on their late grandfather's store to turn it into a woodworking shop.

They have already moved some of their woodworking equipment into the structure.

"I live in Morgantown," said Brad, 44, former WVU Mountaineers and Ripley Vikings football star. "That makes it hard to get time to work on this place."

It's a little easier for Bruce, 46, who lives in Millwood. Bruce and his mother ran Hunt and Anderson's, as it was known for several years, before it closed in 1989. L. O. Hunt turned it over to them after his eyesight began to fail and his wife, Clara, died.

Bruce, as owner of KMBAH Enterprises, llc, is an independent floor covering contractor for Family Carpet of Fairplain. Brad is in sales for Delta Electric's Morgantown office.

The large wood-frame building which served the town for decades as a general store and post office (where the eldest Hunt was the postmaster for many years) has seen better days, but the brothers are finishing the spruce-up work their late father started years ago. The current project, covering the old store with vinyl siding and installing new entrance doors on the former commercial hub of Cottageville, is nearing completion with the hardest work to come.

"We have to cover the east side of the building with siding, and it's curved to fit the plot of land," Bruce said. The original builders used as much of the land as possible, and elected to curve one wall to do that. Accommodations are a little tight on that

side of the building because it is next to a small structure that was at one time the office of Dr. Earley Ben Harrison, who died in the early 1950's after decades of practicing medicine in Cottageville. The Hunt family also owns the office and Harrison's large wood-frame home, which is next door.

"We have thought about incorporating the old doc's office with the store building— connecting them," said Bruce. However, that move is just in the talking stages.

The brothers' ambitious plans call for the concrete platform and steps running the length of the store to be completely ripped out and re-poured as well. It is well over 60 feet long and three steps high.

Remnants of the building's past were all over its outside and underneath it in hunker-down spaces, but a lot of that has been cleaned up by the brothers. Galvanized pipe sections that stuck out from under the floor joists are gone. The odd pile of wood here and there has been removed.

The dark-wood lined interior is a different story though, showing a lot of work to be done—clearing and cleaning. Old canned goods, counters, scales, freezers and tables are where they were two decades ago when the store closed. The gas floor furnace that heated the store for many years has not been removed. Alvin stored old computer CPUs and monitors from his law practice on several shelves in one room.

Alvin Hunt, son of L.O. and Clara Hunt, was a Charleston attorney whose work on the building was interrupted by his illness and death at 78 in 2007. He also poured a lot of time into repairing his parents' big wood-frame home on Main Street in Cottageville. After his retirement, he was well known for his pro-bono law work in the Ripley area.

Lawrence O. Hunt, who died in 1990 at age 82, sold clothing, yard goods, hardware and appliances along with the usual dry goods, groceries and meat for several decades at this rambling location on Main Street in Cottageville.

The "old jot-'em-down" store is really two buildings tied together side by side and a section added in the back in the 1960s for appliance sales. The half of the store Hunt kept in hardware was at one time a harness shop, according to Bruce.

The eldest Hunt had a fine reputation as a businessman and farmer and was active in community affairs, having served as secretary of the Union District School Board, helping start the Cottageville Volunteer Fire Department, and serving as secretary of Cottageville Public Service District.

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