

Tropics Legacy Campaign

1555 5th St, Lincoln, IL 62656

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~ For Immediate Release ~

National Park Service Grant Awarded to Tropics Sign Project

On 8/24/17, the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, which is administered by the National Park Service, National Trails Intermountain Region, notified the Tropics Neon Sign Project Committee it had been awarded a \$17,000 grant. The cost-share grant program provides grant assistance for eligible historic preservation, research, oral history, interpretative, and educational projects. Grants are offered through an annual, competitive grant cycle. Since 2001, 139 projects have been awarded \$2.1 million with \$3.4 million in cost-share match, totaling \$5.5 million in public-private investment toward the revitalization of the Route 66 corridor.

The Tropics restaurant was opened in 1950 by Vince Schwenoha in Lincoln, Illinois. Vince served in Hawaii during his WWII tour of duty, which was the inspiration for the name of his new business. The site included a large, signature neon sign that quickly became the symbol of the restaurant and a Route 66 landmark. In 1955 Lew Johnson became manager of the Tropics. Under the leadership of Lew and his wife, Bev, it operated successfully as a family-run business for the next five decades, attracting customers from far and wide. In 2016, the Tropics was inducted into the Route 66 Association of Illinois Hall of Fame. After sitting vacant for ten years, the property was purchased for the construction of a new McDonalds restaurant. While the building could not be saved, a public/private partnership was put in place between the City of Lincoln, the Logan County Tourism Bureau, and the Johnson Family to preserve and restore the iconic Tropics neon sign.

Thanks to the NPS grant and other funds raised to date, the Tropics sign will be restored to operating condition to honor the history of this well know Rt. 66 restaurant. Included in the project design is an interpretive panel that will tell the story of the Tropics so visitors can learn about the history of the restaurant, its relationship to Route 66, and the long-time involvement of the Johnson family. In addition to preserving an important piece of Lincoln and Logan County's Rt. 66 history, the restored Tropics sign will be used to promote and market other Rt. 66 related attractions in Lincoln.

To date, approximately \$60,000 of the total \$70,000 needed to complete the Tropics neon sign project has been raised. The opportunity is still available for donors wishing to

contribute to the project. “TLC Champion” donors, [\$1,000 or more] will be recognized on the interpretive panel installed by the restored Tropics sign. “TLC Partner” donors [\$500 or more donation] will be recognized on pavers placed around the base of the sign. “TLC Benefactor” donors [\$250 or more donation] will be recognized via a brick installed at the base of the sign. Donation information is available from the Logan County Tourism Bureau, 217-732-8687.

For additional information contact:

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Tropics Sign photo circa 2007, photo credit Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway

