

What could be done with the Dairy Barn?



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Interested community members envision potential future uses for threatened landmark



(Photo: Melinda Martinez/mmartinez@theto, Melinda Martinez/mmartinez@theto)

Some people envision the Central Dairy Barn as an events venue. Others see it being used for office space, or a restaurant.

Those were just a few of the ideas suggested at a "Save the Dairy Barn at Buhlow Lake" fundraiser Tuesday night.

"We all have our ideas of what it could be," said Dave Curry, a member of the committee leading the effort to preserve the landmark in Pineville. "We have opportunities. But if we don't save it, those will only be dreams."

Located on the grounds of Central Louisiana State Hospital and overlooking U.S. Highway 165, the Dairy Barn is one of the area's iconic historic structures. But time and neglect have left it vulnerable.

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The Save the Dairy Barn effort grew out of a Facebook page started by Kendra Van Cleef, one of the eventual committee members. It grew into the current nonprofit that is raising money to preserve the structure and protect it from the elements, in hopes that someone will renovate and reuse it in the future.

"She really hit a nerve in this community," said committee member Nathan Martin. "This is something people are passionate about."

The group held a fundraiser at Brainsurge in Alexandria Tuesday, where they shared the history of the Dairy Barn with participants, updated their progress and asked for input on future uses.

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More than \$20,000 had been raised going into the fundraiser. Supporters got some good news Tuesday night when the Historical Association of Central Louisiana presented the committee with a \$5,000 check.

The first \$70,000 raised will go towards stabilizing the north wall — the building's most vulnerable point. The total cost to protect and preserve the structure is estimated at \$250,000.

"As with any home or structure, you have to keep the water and win out," said Tom David with Pan American Engineers, which performed a free assessment of the barn to determine the costs of protecting and renovating it. "It doesn't take an engineering degree to see the north wall is about to pull off the building. One gust of wind ... and that north wall could be lying on the hillside."



Dave Curry, a committee member with Save the Barn at Buhlow Lake, shows how old barns have been repurposed into attractions in other areas of the country at a fundraiser Tuesday. (Photo: Jeff Matthews/The Town Talk)

David used the example of the Paramount Theater, a downtown Alexandria landmark that was demolished in the late 1980s after its roof collapsed.

"We all had dreams of saving the Paramount Theater," he said. "But we didn't move fast enough. I would hope this community wouldn't have to face that same angst if we lost the barn."

Those in attendance Tuesday had plenty of ideas about how a renovated barn could be used.

Many see it as an ideal venue for events such as weddings or theater productions. Others see it housing offices, a restaurant, a farmers market, a museum or an art gallery.

Rich Dupree, chief of staff for Pineville Mayor Clarence Fields, said the city sees the barn being the centerpiece of a commercial development as the best opportunity to attract private investment.

"We're going to do this," Van Cleef said. "It's going to happen."

For more information, visit www.savethedairybarn.com (<http://www.savethedairybarn.com/>) or [Save the Dairy Barn at Buhlow Lake](https://www.facebook.com/Save-the-Dairy-Barn-at-Buhlow-Lake-1527535524155059/) (<https://www.facebook.com/Save-the-Dairy-Barn-at-Buhlow-Lake-1527535524155059/>) on Facebook.

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