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The Museum at Lassen's Resort is looking to restore the historic resort-era hotel.

Hotel revival in the works

Historic Cedar Lake building has been museum since 1986

JOSEPH S. PETE
joseph.pete@nwi.com,
219-933-3316

Cedar Lake's golden resort era of the 1920s could soon come roaring back to life.

The former Lassen Hotel is the last remnant of a time when vacationers flocked to Cedar Lake to swim, splash around and enjoy the outdoors.

The historic two-story clapboard-clad building with a wraparound veranda and porch with rocking chairs looking out over the gently ripping lake hasn't been a hotel for nearly 80 years. It's now home to the Museum at Lassen's Resort and could soon add a boutique hotel.

Executive Director Julie Zasada unveiled plans to transform the second floor over the museum, 7408 Constitution Ave., into a boutique hotel harkening back to the historic building's role as



Museum at Lassen's Resort Executive Director Julie Zasada and South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority President/CEO David Uran introduce the new hotel concept.

a hotel during the 1920s through the 1940s. It could bring visitors to town and accommodate wedding and anniversary parties that already come there for its vintage speakeasy experience, throwback cocktails and sweeping lakefront views.

"We're not pulling any triggers just yet," she said. "But with your support, as this building enters its second century as a living history destination, we're going to present an extremely unique experience that can provide economic impact to the town and re-

store Lassens' legacy more fully.

"We have a vision. With diligent hard work, it can come to fruition. We ask you to dream with us and be determined. More importantly, we ask for your support."

South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority President/CEO David Uran, a Cedar Lake native, said the project could benefit the fast-growing lakeside town in south Lake County.

"In order to preserve your quality of life, you've got to look at the assets that you have and why you moved here," he said. "You're standing on one of the few remaining historical assets here in Cedar Lake."

The 800-acre lake at the heart of Cedar Lake has potential as an economic engine for the community, Uran said.

"This is your downtown," he said. "Whiting, Crown Point and Hobart all have beautiful downtowns, but this would be the envy of any of them. We start to look at what we can do with something

Lassen's

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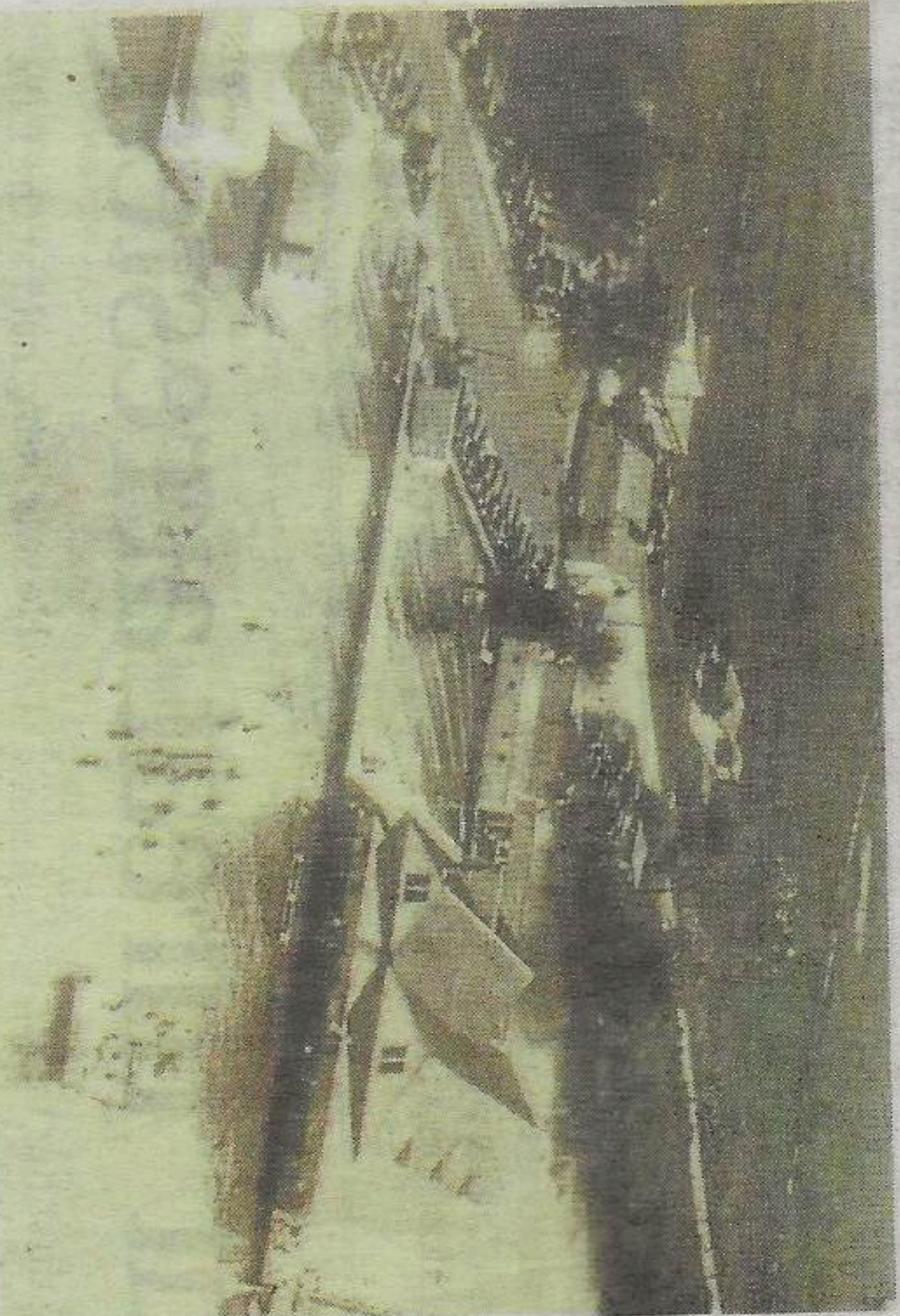
like this and keep historic opportunities here. Obviously, things grow. Things develop and things change. But those can co-exist if people have the right vision and work together toward a common goal."

The building went up in 1895 as a boarding house for the Armour Meats workers who harvested ice from the lake in winter to supply Chicago's Union Stockyards until mechanical refrigeration made the grueling and dangerous work obsolete. It was moved across the frozen lake in 1920 by the Lassen brothers, who'd had a resort in Cedar Lake since the late 19th century.

They built the porch with lumber from the old ice barns that kept meat fresh as it traveled on trains around the country. People still idle away time there, often to watch the sunsets over the lake.

In its heyday, The Lassen Hotel had a dance hall, saloon, orchard, miniature golf course, cottages, a water slide dumping thrill-seekers into Cedar Lake, and a buffet restaurant on piers over the water.

The hotel closed in 1944 and became a camp for the Lake Region Christian Assembly until the 1970s.



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The Museum at Lassen's Resort during its resort-era heyday.

Nancy Lear with guest services at the museum remembers going there as a kid for weekend retreats. All ages of kids from area churches flocked there.

"Our adult sponsors took us on a hike across the frozen lake in the winter, and our parents had a fit when they found out," she said. "It was a lot of fun. I remember in the summer we would come out Sunday afternoon and return Friday night, so we'd spend most of the week. We'd sing and we had a

campfire pit between the hotel and the lake. We had swim time in the afternoon. We did Bible study on the porch or under the shelters. We did sports like baseball. It was just a real variety. There was a little canoe where we could buy pop and candy. I haven't slept in this building since the 1970s. I would love to come back here and stay!"

The former hotel was later added to the National Register of Historic Places and acquired by the town.

The Cedar Lake Historical As-

sociation saved and refurbished the building, which is next to the Lighthouse Restaurant and a small public beach. The historical society opened the Lake of the Red Cedars Museum there in 1986 and rebranded it as the Museum at Lassen's Resort in 2021 after a major renovation that added the seven-room "Story of Cedar Lake" exhibit that includes mastodon bones, a model railroad replica of the ice harvesting industry and huge black-and-white photos of Cedar Lake's golden age as a recreational getaway.

The museum takes up the first floor of the building. The Cedar Lake Historical Association developed a proof-of-concept bridal suite on the second floor to show what a hotel would look like. It features lakefront views, modern amenities and historical touches, such as black-and-white photos, vintage luggage and a seamstress mannequin in a period dress.

"We have created a sample hotel room," Zasada said. "We are looking to restore the Lassens' legacy more fully, and that means bringing back the hotel experience. We would still maintain the museum and still have community gathering spaces, but people would be able to stay here someday in a boutique hotel."

The hotel would be open year-round and would potentially have 12 rooms, but the exact size hasn't been decided.

The Cedar Lake Historical Association plans to soon present the project to the Town Council. There's no timeline yet.

"It's a big, big project," she said. "There's a lot of steps that need to take place, starting with the foundation all the way up to the roof. We have a lot of steps. This was a hotel. We want to see that come back."

It wouldn't be the first combination museum/hotel, but it would be a rare hybrid. The Louisville-based 21c chain has art museum/hotels in a few cities in the middle of the country, including Chicago.

The Cedar Lake Historical Association would restore hardwood floors, trim, doors and windows in the former and potentially future Lassen Hotel to maintain its historic status.

"Beyond that, we want you to be as comfortable as you would be in any other modern hotel," she said. "Right now you can come and have an excellent meal in Cedar Lake and visit the museum, but you can't stay and actually spend a weekend or any length of time. We want it to be a destination where people can actually stay."