

# There's a light at the end of the tunnel for Nevada State Prison

By Ronni Hannaman

There continues to be a pent-up demand to open the historic Nevada State Prison and, for those watching the progress, rejoice, there's a light at the end of the tunnel.

Some were lucky enough to be able to enjoy the informative tours before the state Public Works Board closed the prison mandating the Nevada State Prison Preservation Society (NSPPS) spend thousands of dollars to determine whether the 155-year-old prison could meet ADA requirements to allow for regularly scheduled tours, even though when open, the prison was ADA compliant for prisoners.

The Chamber was fortunate to be able to use the backdrop of the prison for their 70th Annual Meeting in 2015. The NSPPS staff worked hard to prepare the prison yard for this historic event that might showcase how the site could be used for future concerts and events. Over 300 attended this historic event.

Unfortunately, with a change of guard at the Department of Corrections and scrutiny by the Public Works Board, things came

to a screeching halt and the NSPPS was charged with raising thousands of dollars they did not have to hire architects and engineers to determine whether a Change of Use Permit could be granted. This wasn't just simply red tape to mire through, this was a brick wall.

As NSPPS President Glen Whorton writes, "This has been an extremely busy year for the preservation of the Nevada State Prison despite the fact access to the facility has been limited. After the Chamber leadership academy event last spring, NSPPS was informed that a "Change of Use Permit" would be required before tours could resume. This is a complicated process involving architects, engineers, and six state agencies."

With the assistance of the Chamber 2016 Leadership Institute class to raise funds, the society engaged Dube' Group architects and the final stages now are being done to design the tour route and the modifications needed to make certain the proposed tours could comply with state and federal requirements.

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COURTESY

NSPPS president Glen Whorton hopes to be able to unlock the doors to the Nevada State Prison soon to allow the public to visit this historic site.

# PRISON

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Whorton adds, “The Director of the Department of Corrections has committed to completing the request for the change of use which goes to various agencies for

review.”

What will it further take to open this landmark to become another tourism attraction in our city attracting those who love historic prisons? Whorton states it will cost even more money than has already

been expended to get to this point. The bank account has been drained to pay for the architectural review and renderings. But, things are looking up. According to Whorton, “The International Footprint Association, Chapter 72, from Minden,

recently donated \$1,000. In addition, Sheriff Ron Pierini of Douglas County has donated all of his artifacts from the time of his employment at the Prison.”

Learning how to navigate the grant scene, NSPPS applied to the John Ben Snow Foundation and Memorial Trust, and Whorton is pleased to announce the successful grant funding of \$12,500. They also were granted \$2,000 from the Estelle J. Kelsey

Foundation. Whorton states, “That was especially poignant for the foundation trustees are Don and Carolyn Bernard. Don’s father was the prison warden in the 1950s and his family was the last to live in the warden’s house.”

The NSPPS invites the public to join them in their efforts to raise needed monies by joining the society as an individual or life member. The Chamber joined the Society as a Life

Member for \$200, a small amount when considering the gain this historic attraction may have to our economy, not to mention our historic pride. We encourage all to join at whatever level you can afford whether at the \$20 senior/student level or the business level at \$500. This is a volunteer organization and no monies are expended for salaries.

Don’t let the prison go the way of so much of our unique history; let’s all invest in the future while showcasing our historic past. Go to the NSPPS website for more information on how to join: [www.nevadastateprison.org](http://www.nevadastateprison.org). If we all contribute even a little, we’ll bring back a bit of our history for current and future generations to enjoy. Or, if you prefer, come by the Chamber. We’ll proudly take your donation to pass on to NSPPS. We still have some of the holiday ornaments featuring the prison if you are looking for them.



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