

## Historic Hemet Theatre readies for reopening

By **Diane A. Rhodes** April 9, 2022



*Artist Dan Melendez stands beside an Art Deco style logo he created that is featured behind the concession stand inside the Historic Hemet Theatre's lobby. He plans to add some finishing touches before the scheduled June reopening*

Artist Dan Melendez dedicated the past several months to bringing the Golden Age of Hollywood back to the lobby of the Historic Hemet Theatre. The COVID-19 pandemic, which closed the venue to live concerts and other social events since March 2020, gave volunteers of the nonprofit Historic Hemet Theatre Foundation time to regroup and concentrate on a much-needed renovation to the 100-year-old cornerstone of downtown Hemet.

When Melendez was approached to lend his talent to the project, he put a lot of thought into how to create a feeling of elegance by studying classics such as Grauman's Chinese Theatre and the Hollywood Pantages Theatre, both built during the height of the Art Deco period.

Susan Carrier, CEO and foundation board president, worked closely with Downtown Deli owner Steve Covington on interior design ideas for the vintage movie house before Melendez came on board. After Covington's death in 2019, Carrier gave one of his sketches to Melendez to serve as the basis for the mural that greets guests when they enter the lobby.



A painting by Dan Melendez that includes a life-size rendering of Marilyn Monroe will add a touch of the Golden Age of Hollywood to the Historic Hemet Theatre. Valley News/Diane A. Rhodes photo



Dan Melendez stands next to a mural he painted inside the vintage Historic Hemet Theatre lobby based on a sketch by the late Steve Covington.

"This mural is an homage to Steve, to keep his memory alive," Melendez said.

When the theater's programming director Bryan Carrier died in October 2020, Susan Carrier agreed to have Melendez add her husband's face to the box office window as part of the mural.

"That was my dedication to Bryan; without him I never would have been asked to do this," Melendez said.

The new logo also boasts an Art Deco style and has been painted on many interior doors and walls. The first mural Melendez painted includes a life-size portrait of Marilyn Monroe in a regal pose that fits right in with the lobby's new look.

Melendez's art career spans the past 40 years with commissions from Budweiser, the Detroit Red Wings and Bass Pro Shops as well as many sports and retail venues. Originally from Southern California, he lived in Michigan for many years before moving to Hemet to be closer to family.

"This project became more a labor of love for me," Melendez said. "My approach would have been a little different if the theater had been open while I was here painting. Because I had no time constraints, I was able to add little things as I went along. I think it's great that the foundation did this for the community. Their attention to detail throughout this whole renovation project shows people they care."

The HHT Foundation still needs donations to help with expenses during the reopening that is planned for June, when concerts are currently scheduled to resume. Grants and an SBA loan have sustained them through the closures, but additional funds will allow them to take on a couple of special projects, such as hanging \$30,000 worth of donated surround-sound speakers so the theater can once again show first-run movies.

The foundation is also asking community members to volunteer their time to help put the finishing touches on some of the renovations. Anyone with experience and a willingness to assist with painting, carpentry, plumbing, welding, miscellaneous touch-up projects and publicity are invited to contact Ray Rodriguez at 951-437-2523 or [lcdrrodsplevents@gmail.com](mailto:lcdrrodsplevents@gmail.com).

The nonprofit Historic Hemet Theatre Foundation was incorporated in 2011 under the name The Valley View Foundation and is dedicated to the creation of a unique hub that will enrich the community with three key impacts: historic preservation of one of the oldest theaters in the nation, cultural enrichment through performing arts and educational programming and economic revitalization of Hemet's historic downtown district.

For more information, visit <http://www.historichemettheatre.com> or 951-658-5950.