

Press Times City pages™

July 21-18, 2023

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From
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and beyond

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A LOOK AT WHAT'S TO COME FROM GREEN BAY'S TARL KNIGHT

By Janelle Fisher
City Pages Editor

Big things are on the horizon for Tarl Knight, owner of The Tarlton Theatre in Green Bay's Broadway District and the recently announced music venue At The Tracks in Green Bay's Shipyard District.

Since purchasing The Tarlton Theatre in 2018 with Mark Mariucci, Knight has worked hard to restore the historic venue and make a space for arts and entertainment on Broadway.

Knight's passion for both arts and entertainment and the preservation of historic sites, however, actually started when Knight, now 27, was a teenager.

"I come from a music background," he said. "I was a musician and I wrote music and I got involved with a music festival in Sturgeon Bay called the Steel Bridge Songfest... It was the coolest thing — the most novel kind of music festival concept. The whole purpose of that was to save and preserve the historic bridge on Michigan Street standing in Sturgeon Bay... What it did was really teach me a lot about the value of historic preservation and about community building in a downtown — especially in a small downtown. It taught me about the value of arts and culture and coming together and building an arts and culture community and protecting and preserving and supporting original music

and art... When I turned 19, I started going to the city hall meetings and started fighting the city council and the mayor on preserving the bridge, and other historic sites in Sturgeon Bay and in Door County started popping up... I got the chance to really build my identity from that environment."

When Knight moved to Green Bay, he said he knew he wanted to continue developing that part of his identity — and The Tarlton Theatre proved to be the perfect place.

"When I came to Green Bay, Mark, my business partner, I found out he once owned the old historic West Theatre and it really clicked that we were going to be the perfect match to bring this thing back to life. Since then, I just continue to see the value in preserving that history."

Knight and Mariucci have big plans for the continued preservation and restoration of The Tarlton Theatre, and last year formed a nonprofit to assist with funding for those endeavors.

"We formed a new 501c3 and a nonprofit called the Historic West Fund, and the goal of that was to announce it to the community and work to preserve the building and a lot of the art deco elements," he said. "There's the historical architecture, much more broadly, to the artistic relevance of the space, but especially a lot of the art deco elements of



▲ The Tarlton Theatre recently received a fresh coat of paint, one of many planned projects in the effort to preserve and restore the historic building. Submitted photo
 ► At The Tracks, a new music venue, will be situated in Green Bay's Shipyard District, in the building formerly occupied by Rockabilly's Saloon. Staff photo

that space. The mission is to preserve and restore them through some renovations."

People who have passed by The Tarlton Theatre in the last week or so might have noticed some changes underway already, as the facade received a fresh coat of paint, changing the exterior of the building from purple to black.

"Starting from the outside felt like a really nice rebranding so we can start to work a little bit on raising some money through that nonprofit and working on that marquee. The marquee is 80 years old and one of the last [of its kind] still standing, so I hope to really refurbish that so we have this really beautiful sign out on the front, along with different elements on the outside of the theatre... It's really a spectacle, with the black and there are more elements that we hope to get restored for more of an artistic appearance. Although the purple was fun while we had it, it was just a little too Barney-ish in the end."

A new venue is born

Knight said that recently, The Tarlton has had increased interest from local musicians looking for a space to perform.

"We've had a huge amount of outreach from local bands," he said. "A lot of that outreach made it apparent that we had to make some space at The Tarlton to accommodate more live music, but The Tarlton has been doing so well... We've been very fortunate that we're booked up all the way through the end of the year and into next year."

Knight said he took those pleas to heart, even if The Tarlton couldn't be the venue they were looking for.

"I'm a workaholic," he said. "Now and then, I have a lot of fun and play, but when there is a call for something like a venue... It's hard for me not to react. It really, really affects me."

Thus, At The Tracks was born.

"We were looking at this old space that just closed a number of months ago as Rockabilly's Saloon, and we thought, 'You know, this is kind of the perfect opportunity. When one door closes, another opens. We have to make this investment because our music scene is worth it and we need to give them a home. We need to preserve this really cool element of the live, original, local arts and music community,'" Knight said. "People who are rock bands and people who are punk bands and all sorts of other genres can come together in one space and really connect with the community and celebrate live music."

The name of the new venue, Knight said, draws inspiration from its location.

"The location is down in the Shipyard District, just south of the tracks and west of the tracks along the river, so calling it At The Tracks is a great way to tie into the history down here as part of the industry and the history of the district," he said. "And hopefully it evokes a blue-collar, industrial, more punk-rock kind of feel. I hope the people enjoy that and the space."

“ You know, this is kind of the perfect opportunity. When one door closes, another opens. We have to make this investment because our music scene is worth it and we need to give them a home. We need to preserve this really cool element of the live, original, local arts and music community. ”

Knight said he hopes the new venue, which is set to be open in time for All Bands On Deck in September, will be an asset to the developing Shipyard District.

"I hope that this will be a great place and bring the right people in," he said. "It's kind of built and led by the community and the bands have input and I think it'll be a really nice home for live music and it'll help the Shipyard District, too. Right now, this area is seeing a lot of excitement with the Shipyard Park development, so we'll see a lot of development down here for businesses."

But wait, there's more

Knight said he is hopeful that increased development will bring new businesses to the Shipyard District, one

of which is already in the works to be housed in the same building as At The Tracks.

"In the same building, there are three different spaces," he said. "Two of them will be At The Tracks, and then one of the spaces will become a coffee and donut shop, which will be Green Bay's only donut shop, really, beside the Dunkin' Donuts... That'll be a really cool offering and something new for this area, which I think the area is lacking."

A new donut shop isn't the only food-focused endeavor on Knight's mind, though, as The Tarlton has also been planning a new food truck park to occupy space next to The Tarlton Theatre.

Knight said more details regarding the planned food truck park will likely be available in the fall. **CP**

