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Coca-Cola Sign Shines Once Again

Collaboration ensures historic neon sign will shine for decades in resurgent downtown

The electric Coca-Cola sign, a vivid part of downtown life for more than three generations, is shining over Third Street again. Mayor Kip Holden flipped a switch this evening to ceremonially relight the historic sign on Third and Florida streets.

"I appreciate the cooperation that will allow this downtown icon to light up Third Street again," said Mayor Holden. "The Coca-Cola sign is a part of Baton Rouge history. For so many of us, it's the backdrop of our childhood memories of growing up in Baton Rouge, and now it will shine brightly for generations to come."

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation took possession of the sign through a donation from the Arts Council in October; Entergy Corp. agreed to cover the cost of keeping the lights burning, and Baton Rouge Coca-Cola Bottling Co. will pay for upkeep of the vintage billboard. Building owner Mike Crouch and Raising Canes owner Todd Graves were among people instrumental in completing the transfer of the sign.

The sign first flickered into the city's history in around 1951, six years after World War II ended and veterans began returning to the comforts of home. Flashing "Pause, Refresh" with the familiar Coca-Cola logo in Spencerian script, the sign was mounted above Liggett Drugs, the largest self-serve store of its kind in the South. Customers could wander open aisles and select what they wanted to buy, without the assistance of a drug store employee. The electric sign stayed on until, finally, Hurricane Andrew's winds blew out the neon lights altogether in 1992.

Interest in restoring it was shown 2002, when Entergy, Coca-Cola, the Downtown Development District, the Arts Council of Baton Rouge and the Downtown Business Association—formerly the Downtown Merchants Association—aligned to refurbish the billboard. Coca Cola funded the replacement of old transponders and installation of new neon before the eventual donation of the sign by building owners Jocelyn and Elvin Richoux to the Arts Council. The Downtown Business Association contributed to the cost of quarterly maintenance, while Entergy covered the cost of power.

Upon the reworked agreement, the sign was refurbished earlier this year.