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The Hotel Dale Today

By Patti Richter Simpson



Since its construction during the Great Depression in 1931, the early history of the Hotel Dale has been well documented. Built and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Lee Luke, the original six story, 73 room hotel has seen many changes over the last 79 years.

In the early 1960s a brick two-story addition was made on the east side of the Hotel. The first floor of approximately 2,000 square feet, housed a restaurant while the second story boasted a banquet/reception room and a three-bedroom, multi-bath apartment. Dr. Robert J. Butz (Sr.) had his office there for a short while and even the Rotary met at the Hotel Dale for a time too. According to the Phelps County History Book, Mr. Jess "Curly" Baker was the manager in 1980 when the 73 guest rooms were converted into apartments.

But what's happening at the Hotel Dale today?

Having lived in Holdrege most of my life, the

Hotel is known to me as the tall brick landmark situated at the corner of Fourth and East Avenues. I had never been beyond the first floor and my curiosity was such that I just wanted to check it out for myself. Last October I decided to see if I could get a look. A couple of phone calls later and I had an appointment to meet with the manager, Troy Rice for a tour.

Troy manages the building for the current owner, Don True of Kearney. Don purchased the Hotel from Ron Early in January 2000. Along with managing the Hotel Dale and having an apartment there, Troy also works for Don True's company, Al's Heating & Air located in Kearney. Troy's permanent residence is in Kearney, and he only stays at the Hotel Dale when needed.

The Hotel Dale is still called home by several residents. There are currently 30 residential apartments in the building, some of which are furnished. Several apartments have 2 or 3 bedrooms with most of those having 2 bathrooms. The Hotel also has four commercial properties. Three of those face East Avenue and the fourth is the old restaurant area which faces Fourth Avenue. The commercial space occupied by Smitty's Barber Shop, recently celebrated its 50th consecutive year of business there in the Hotel Dale.

On October 20, 2009, I and a couple of friends met the Hotel's manager, Troy Rice for a tour of the building. When you first enter the front lobby, you are struck by just



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how much this building is caught in time. The painted concrete walls surround the lobby's sitting area. To the left, along the west wall are three closed doors and I realize they are the "back doors" to the three commercial properties along East Avenue. A couple of doors on the north wall lead to a closet and a small bathroom. To the right of the front door, just past the reception desk is the entrance to the old restaurant. Left of the restaurant entrance are wide concrete stairs that lead to the upper floors. Behind the back wall of the reception desk is another set of wide concrete stairs leading to the basement. The hotel's only elevator is next to the stairs. The lobby is all carpeted and we are told later that underneath the carpet, there is still a beautiful mosaic tile floor. In the lobby are large concrete support posts approximately three feet square. We learn that these support posts run the entire height of the hotel so if desired, each floor could be remodeled to be just as open as the lobby.

After some introductions, Troy takes my two friends and I to the upper floors. The elevator attendant, Delano Nelson chauffeurs us. The elevator is a little small for the five of us, but thanks to Delano running the controls, it is the smoothest elevator ride I have ever been on. When I comment on how well kept the elevator is, Troy politely thanks us, as keeping the elevator in good shape is one of his duties.



I soon learn that Delano is 73 years old. He began his career at the Hotel Dale when he was just 16 years old. Delano is well known down town. On the ride up he tells us of the Hotel's hey-day when it was "thee place" to be. His work there gave him the opportunity to meet several famous people who stayed at or passed through the Hotel Dale including the Three Stooges, Ernie Stubbs and Gene Autry to name just a few.

It doesn't take long to reach the top floor. We step off the elevator into a narrow hallway with several metal pipes running above our heads. There is a wall and window a few feet to our right. I look out and see the courthouse to the north. There is an old fire escape outside that leads down to the roof of the two story building below. I notice the floors, walls and ceilings are all poured concrete. I tap the walls to see if it's plastered, but I don't think it is. Troy tells us that the entire building is made of concrete, brick and tile. The only wood construction in the six story hotel are the doors and windows. The only remains of carpet in the hallway is dried black glue. I asked about the pipes and learned that the building is heated and cooled with a water system. This is original to the building. I can see them using a boiler system for heating in 1936, but cooling too? That had to be cutting edge for the times.

Our short hallway t-bones into another longer hallway that runs east and west. Troy shows us a couple of unoccupied apartments. They have the basic furniture in them such as a sofa, bed and refrigerator. Some floors are carpeted, but the bathrooms and small closet-like kitchen floors are decorated in beautiful old mosaic tiles. With the smaller hotel rooms being combined to form larger one and two bedroom apartments, the floor plan appears a little chopped up and you end up walking

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through one bedroom to get to another. Each bedroom appears to have a small bathroom of its own.

In the upper southwest corner, we get to look out over the city of Holdrege. It's a little foggy out, but it's a

beautiful view. Troy tells us he enjoys photography and has several great photos of both the building and the views.



Troy then takes us to the second floor so we can see the large three bedroom apartment located over the old restaurant. We first go through a large door and into a reception looking area. The room is as long as the building is wide. It has a tiled floor with large windows on the south looking over Fourth Avenue. There is a reception desk/snack bar looking area on the one end. On the far side of the room is another large door. Behind it is the three bedroom apartment. The old architecture is wonderful. Each of the three bedrooms has their own bathroom. There is a large living room with windows looking over Fourth Avenue. A wide walk through galley-type kitchen leads to another small



den. The den has a walk-out balcony over the east alley and the north wall is completely covered with wood paneling, recessed shelves and a built-in television set from the 1960s. Troy tells us that the old set still works. On further investigation, we see that the entire wall is actually several large built-in cupboards with flat doors. Unfortunately a water leak has severely damaged part of the wall. In the southeast corner of this room is a freight elevator that goes down to the restaurant and basement level below.

We then tour to the basement. There are many, many storage rooms down there. At the bottom of the staircase, I notice the doorway of one large dark room. The floor here again has these beautiful mosaic tiles. Troy tells us that this is the



old men's restroom, complete with showers, several stalls and sinks. Apparently the Hotel catered to traveling businessmen. Currently the room is used to store old furniture and fixtures.

To the right off the elevator is another doorway into a long east/west hallway. This leads to the northwest corner of the building where an operational laundromat area is used by the residents. Going east down the same hallway takes you to the maze of the mechanical rooms. Troy leads us through narrow paths and semi-darkness to show us the new boiler system that they have installed. It is huge.

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Troy tells us that they have updated and replaced all the heating, cooling, pipes, etc. that they can get to. They have even installed security cameras to keep the “riff-raff” out. Troy told us that since they installed the camera system some time ago, they have had very little trouble. The tenants appreciate the security it gives them.

The east end of the restaurant area is currently home for some equipment for a heating and air business. The kitchen is still fully equipped and once in awhile Troy treats the hotel residents with a home cooked meal.

Troy tells us that after all the updates and money the owner has put into the building, the Hotel Dale is once again up for sale.

To say that the Hotel Dale is a sound and sturdy building would be an understatement. Its history and contribution to this area run deep. It

stands as a test of time here on the plains of Nebraska. It makes me wonder what will happen to this old stately building. The potential is there for so many possibilities. One can imagine it being remodeled to offer a large banquet hall covering one floor for wedding and anniversary receptions while other floors could be used for large uptown apartments or office space.

The current owner has done a lot to update the mechanical features of the Hotel. I only hope the next owners will take it to the next level and update the interior to once again make it one of Holdrege’s featured attractions.

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