Though Crick Camera Shop is closed, its iconic neon sign might have a bright future

By Aaron Randle - February 10, 2017

Turns out the end of the Crick Camera Shop story might wind up as a new beginning.

A month ago, the store, at 7715 State Line Road, closed its doors after more than 70 years, a victim of the digital revolution, online shopping and the lack of a buyer. Owners Dana Crick and her brother-in-law Bill Thomas began to gut the store and strip the lettering from the windows. As the final, most notable act of cessation, the iconic neon Crick Camera Shop sign was brought down, with plans to discard it.

When local photographer and longtime Crick customer Nick Vedros heard about the sign’s fate, he wanted to do something to save it.

“I bought some of my earliest cameras at Crick as a teenager back in the ’60s,” says Vedros, 63.

“I opened up a dialogue with Dana Crick, though I had never met her. I told her how much Crick meant to me over the years and how I wanted to find somewhere where the sign wouldn’t be destroyed.”

Then Vedros took things a step further. Instead of just salvaging the Crick sign by storing it away, why not celebrate the sign and others like it? Thus became
Vedros’ new endeavor: to amass as many local neon signs as possible and find a home where they can all be displayed as a shining ode to Kansas City history.

It’s been done before. One of the major attractions in Las Vegas is the Neon Museum and its outdoor Neon Boneyard, displaying more than 200 of Las Vegas’ most famous old neon signs — Caesars Palace, the Stardust, the Golden Nugget. The Boneyard is a popular destination for photo shoots, filmmakers and creatives, but it also provides a way for Vegas to pay homage to its history by memorializing the edifices that once defined it.

Glendale, Calif., has its Museum of Neon Art. Cincinnati has the American Sign Museum. The lobby of the Chicago History Museum is festooned with neon signs of the city’s past.

“I think the community would be interested in preserving that history of Kansas City before it’s too late,” Vedros says. “I envision we could find signs from old hotels, bowling alleys, drive-thrus, etc.”

Vedros has found temporary storage for the Crick sign in the Crossroads. His plans are in the very early stages, but he says he is canvassing for a permanent, more public and more prominent home for what could become Kansas City’s own neon boneyard.

He’ll also need more signs. So far he has two: the Crick and an old Thriftway grocery store sign. There’s also the issue of funding. It’ll take money to haul in the signs and have them hung — the Crick sign is nearly 10 feet long and weighs almost 200 pounds, and the Thriftway sign is even bigger. Depending on their various states, it will cost more to have the signs refurbished.

He has the support of Dana Crick, as well as friends like art director Stephanie Leedy, Randy Steinmetz of Steinmetz Neon, real estate magnate Suzy Aron and advertising executive Bob Bernstein.

Still, Vedros says it’ll take more: “This can’t just be in my lap. I’ve got to find a group of people and neon enthusiasts to help me with this project.”

To help, email Vedros at nick.vedros@icloud.com.

“I just really hope we can make this happen. I don’t know what’s in store for the future.”

Here’s hoping it’s a bright one.