Thank you for becoming a passport holder and joining us in this year of sheltering in place for an online version of the Neon Speaks Festival & Symposium. The Zoom-recorded events of September 25-26-27 and October 3-4, 2020 are available for passport holders to watch online for the rest of the year. Neon is a vibrant invention that has evolved to create high art as well as cultural landmarks. Get to know all of the neon makers, artists, historians, and preservationists who volunteered their time and talent for these presentations.

Registered passport holders receive a confirmation email with a secret link to watch recordings.

TO REQUEST A LINK RESEND, CONTACT NEONSPEAKS@GMAIL.COM
Welcome to the Neon Speaks Passport Souvenir Program and Guide to Online Event Recordings.

A Celebration of Neon Art, Sign Design, and the Preservation of Vintage Neon Signs

The Third Annual Neon Speaks Festival & Symposium was produced by San Francisco Neon in proud partnership with the Tenderloin Museum and the Museum of Neon Art. This year’s programming was made possible by grants from San Francisco Heritage and the National Trust for Historic Preservation; and through the support of sponsorships and passport donations.

Co-Producers & Hosts
Al Barna & Randall Ann Homan
San Francisco Neon

Wise Advisors
Charles Chapman, Katie Conry, Dydia DeLyser, Allen Sawyer, Jim Van Buskirk, Kate Widdows

Website Developer
Gary R. Weisberg

Special thanks to the staff of the Tenderloin Museum and the Museum of Neon Art.

Register for a Neon Speaks Passport at neonspeaks.org

social media tags: #neonspeaks #neonspeaks2020

IG: @neonspeaks
FB: Neon Speaks

Neon lost forever includes this lively sign for Pacific Travel Services on Clay Street in San Francisco’s Chinatown. Photo by Merideth Grierson, 1980

Program content © A Barna/R. Homan, San Francisco Neon
THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS 2020

✦ NOVIAL GOLD LEVEL
Novial Gold is our highest level of sponsorship! Thanks to Museum of Neon Art and SF Neon for donating time and expertise.

✦ RUBY RED LEVEL
Sponsorships by Charles Chapman and Annette Smith. In-kind donation sponsorship by Jim Rizzo of Neon Works Oakland.

✦ COBALT BLUE LEVEL
Sponsorships by Sandra Price, Touch Inc. & Jack M. Lapidos, and by Tod Swormstedt and the American Sign Museum.

✦ EMERALD GREEN LEVEL
Sponsorships by Preservation Action Council of San Jose, the Art Deco Society of California, Sheila B. Balter, David Keenan, Heather David, and NYC Pals of Neon Speaks

BECOME A SPONSOR OF THE 2021 NEON SPEAKS FESTIVAL & SYMPOSIUM TO CHAMPION THE NATIONAL PRESERVATION MOVEMENT FOR HISTORIC NEON SIGNS. DONATE ONLINE AT NEONSPEAKS.ORG
Cycle Center, Natick, MA
Photo: Dave Waller/Neon Williams
Collection: Dave & Lynn Waller
2020 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS
✦ All events recorded on Zoom✦

PASSPORT HOLDERS RECEIVE A SECRET LINK TO VIEW, REGISTER AT NEONSPEAKS.ORG

DAY 1  Friday, Sept 25, 2020

INTRO TO NEON: Beginning to See the Light
If this is your first time attending Neon Speaks, this online session is for you. Featuring Tod Swormstedt of the American Sign Museum, Dydia DeLyser and Paul Greenstein, Kate Widdows, and Lippy. Photo: collection of J. E. Tillmany, courtesy of San Francisco History Center

Long Break

VIRTUAL TOUR: SF Neon Tender-Nob
From the gritty to the sublime, zigzag through the corridors of this historic neighborhood situated between the Tenderloin and Nob Hill districts in San Francisco. Photo: Randall Ann Homan

Short Break

OPENING NIGHT CELEBRATION: Preservation Forum
Join us for a virtual celebration with a lineup of panelists at the forefront of neon preservation: Tom E. Rinaldi, Stephanie Cisneros, Jude Cook, André Luthard, Corky Scholl, and Debra Jane Seltzer. Photo: Al Barna
DAY 2  Saturday, Sept 26, 2020

BEHIND THE SCENES: Philadelphia and Boston
Len Davidson of the Neon Museum of Philadelphia gives a sparkling preview of this new museum. Then Dave and Lynn Waller of Neon Williams, Boston, take us on an insider’s tour of the best vintage neon in their collection. Photo: Neil Benson/Neon Museum of Philadelphia

襲 Short Break

NEON CURIOSITY LOUNGE, PART 1
Part art exhibit, part maker fair, part science project. Satisfy your neon curiosity! Presenters include: Bill Concannon, Karen Heisler, Morgan Crook and Danielle James, Amy Palms, Michael Mintz, Laura Stevenson, and Dan Kuppe. Photo: Dydia DeLyser

襲 Long Break

BEHIND THE SCENES: Museum of Neon Art (MONA) and Nevada Neon Project
Spend an evening with the advocates and educators who champion vintage neon preservation in the West: Eric Lynxwiler and Ani Mnatsakanyan of the Museum of Neon Art in Glendale, CA, and Will Durham of the Nevada Neon Project in Reno. Photos: MONA and Nevada Neon Project

襲 Short Break

VIRTUAL TOUR: Tenderloin Neon + Matchbooks SF
Follow an historic trail via neon and matchbooks with the Tenderloin Museum’s Katie Conry with Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan for an online journey of stunning visuals. You’ll see vintage matchbooks and neon signs from hotels, nightclubs, and late-night greasy spoons of the Tenderloin’s mid-century nightscape. Photo: Al Barna

NEON Speaks
BOOK FAIR STORE.NEONMONA.ORG
A curated list of classic neon books and new works by this year’s presenters are available for purchase at store.neonmona.org. This online book fair is hosted by The Museum of Neon Art and Neon Speaks. Browse and purchase 15+ titles, including Saving Neon: A Guide to Best Practices. Paperback, 40 pgs, price $20.
NEW YORK STOREFRONTS
James and Karla Murray share their journey to document disappearing storefronts and signs while forging personal connections with the people who own small legacy businesses in New York City. The results of their journey are three wonderful photography books!
Photo: James and Karla Murray

LETTERS FROM THE NIGHT SKY
When letterforms are illuminated in a vintage neon sign, the visual allure is irresistible. This session features Rita Múrias and Paulo Barata of Letreiro Galeria Projecta from Lisbon, Portugal; followed by a Typographers Forum with Stephen Coles, Kunal Patel and Kate Widdows.
Photo: Al Barna

A NEON FAMILY: Dean Blazek and Michael Blazek
Neon pioneer Dean Blazek established the renowned six-week training course at the Neon Workshop in Antigo, Wisconsin, attracting visitors from across the globe. Dean’s son, Michael Blazek, has carried on the family neon tradition in Seattle and Brisbane, Australia. Photo: Michael Blazek

SIGNS, STREETS, AND STOREFRONTS
Lettered Landscapes with Martin Treu
Storefronts and neon signs have a symbiotic relationship. Take a deep dive into the architectural history of the American storefront with Martin Treu, award-winning author of *Signs, Streets, and Storefronts*. Photo courtesy of Martin Treu

VIRTUAL TOUR: Brilliant Storefronts SF
San Francisco’s signs and storefronts represent the intersection of architecture, aesthetics, and advertising. The City has an impressive collection of brilliant storefronts and legacy businesses that are in danger of disappearing due to current financial hardships. Hosted by Martin Treu along with Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan. Photo: Randall Ann Homan
DAY 4

Saturday, Oct 3, 2020

NEON CURIOSITY LOUNGE, PART 2
This virtual Neon Curiosity Lounge is a collection of expert tube-bending artists and neon historians with much to show and tell. Presenters include: Michael Flechtner, Paul Greenstein and Dydia DeLyser, Shawna Peterson, Roxy Rose Score and Lili Lakich, Kody Shafer, and Perry Pfister.

Photo: Michael Flechtner

Short Break

HIGHWAY LIFE: Roots of Black Travel in America
Join award-winning author, photographer, and cultural documentarian Candacy Taylor for an illustrated talk based on her book *Overground Railroad: The Green Book and Roots of Black Travel in America*. Many Green Book sites had brilliant neon signs, some of which Taylor discovered still exist. Photo courtesy Candacy Taylor

Long Break

VIRTUAL TOUR: NEON + GHOST SIGNS SF
The history and soul of the neighborhood shines through in this tour of the Tenderloin via vintage neon signs and ghost signs, those faded historic hand-painted signs on the sides of buildings. Hosted by Kasey Smith, SF Ghost Sign Mapping Project and Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan.

Photo: Al Barna

Short Break

SIGNS UNITED: Stories from the Road
Hit the road while you shelter in place with this global group of artists, photographers, and preservationists. Get to know the Signs United community through short videos submitted by members. Hosted by co-founders Will Hansen and Steve Spiegel.

Photo: Steve Spiegel

Take a tour of *San Francisco in the 1980s* with Merideth Grierson’s remarkable portfolio of the City’s best neon signs. This portfolio has always wanted to be a book, now it is a film! Merideth has graciously shared it with the Neon Speaks audience. The song “Otra Noche en La Viruta” is used by permission from the wonderful band Otros Aires. 

[Watch this video at neonspeaks.org/tours]

Horseshoe photo: Merideth Grierson.
DAY 5  Sunday, Oct 4, 2020

NEON IN HAVANA
Habana Lights members Kadir Lopz, Lissette Alonzo, and Adolfo Nodal give an illustrated talk of their journey to restore vintage neon in Cuba: Havana once had 140 neon-lit cinemas. Signs United members Yanis Carreto and Steve Spiegel contribute their photographs and rich experiences from trips to discover the neon and culture of Havana. Photo: Steve Spiegel

☕ Short Break

SCREENING: NEON Polish documentary
Don’t miss this gorgeous 57-minute film! NEON is an award-winning documentary on the neonization of Poland during the Cold War era. Director Eric Bednarski will join for a Q&A. This is a repeat screening by popular demand! Photo: Hans J. Orth, 1960 Warsaw

☕ Long Break

VIRTUAL TOUR: CHINATOWN NEON
SF Chinatown’s rich collections of neon signs illuminate the history of Grant Avenue in this tour that features historic photographs, video clips, ephemera and an overview of the origins of Chinatown. Hosted by SF Neon and Chris Ying of the Chinese Historical Society of America. Photo: Al Barna

☕ Short Break

CLOSING NIGHT CELEBRATION
Bring your favorite beverage, neon questions, and reflections to this festival-closing celebration. Join presenters and attendees as we reflect on the festival, and toast the glow—and future—of neon. Presentations by Merideth Grierson, Will Durham, and Anika Chusak. Photo: Randall Ann Homan

NEON Speaks
BOOK FAIR
NEON, A LIGHT HISTORY
Is it possible that (once again) everything we know is wrong? Well, in regards to the history of neon, this may well be the case. Dydia DeLyser and Paul Greenstein have penned a brief, but concise history of the neon sign beginning at the beginning: covering scandals, murder, fascists, and forgotten inventors. A full-color, lavishly illustrated electrical bodice ripper, aficionados of neon will find this an indispensable bible to the history of their favorite collision of art and commerce.
Pre-order at store.neonmona.org
All presenter biographies can be found at neonspeaks.org
Kasey Smith
@sfghostsings

Kate Widdows
@katewiddows

Katie Conry
@tenderloinmuseum

Lippy
@lippydotcom

Martin Treu
@main_street_man

Lili Lakich
@lililakcihstudio

Merideth Grierson
sfae.com/artists

Michael Flechtner
@flektro22

Michael Mintz
neongods.com
All presenter biographies can be found at neonspeaks.org.
I remember feeling completely awestruck the first time I saw the iconic neon sign for Piccolo’s in Omaha, Nebraska. This earnest piccolo player luring hungry patrons into a restaurant is the zenith for illuminated signs. This striking sign was designed from a family photo of owner Anthony Piccolo. Ironically, he never played the namesake instrument.

Piccolo’s was a family-owned institution for over eight decades, serving such staples as prime rib and chicken Parmesan. One notable patron was Omaha resident Warren Buffet. In wasn’t unusual to find him having business lunches with the likes of Bill Gates or Yankees star Alex Rodriguez. Unable to navigate the changing waters of the Omaha restaurant scene, Piccolo’s sadly served its last meal on New Year’s Eve 2015.

When I heard the restaurant was closing its doors, I wanted to make sure that the famous sign was not destroyed or irreparably altered. I reached out to Anthony Piccolo’s daughter Donna and we had conversations about the future of the sign for over four years. Donna and her family graciously decided to entrust me with this amazing relic of their family history.

I was excited to make the trek to Omaha to preserve this American icon. To my great surprise, neon luminary and friend Eric Lynxwiler offered to share the journey with me. We had an unforgettable time hunting down neon signs in the towns along Interstate 80. The memories of discovering the Firebird Motor Hotel in Cheyenne or basking in the glow from the Star Noodle Parlor Dragon in Ogden will be happily seared into my brain for a very long time!

—Will Durham, Nevada Neon Project

Photo by Kerry Grant/kerrygrantphoto.com
San Jose’s beloved “Dancing Pig” is back in action after a successful two-year preservation and restoration drive led by the Preservation Action Council of San Jose. The pole-mounted, animated neon oinker began to boogie in the 1950s, but was abandoned in 2007 after its sausage factory home was demolished for a redevelopment plan that has yet to materialize. The community successfully rallied to save the sign in its original location, but its long-term future remained dark until PAC’SJ’s $35,000 “Save Our Dancing Pig” campaign.

Originally designed and built by the Los Angeles-based Electrical Products Corporation, the three-color neon and incandescent bulb-lit porcelain enamel sign was restored by YESCO and local tube-bender Kevin Chong of Silica Valley Glass Studio. The sign and its surrounding land are now owned by Google, which has committed to keeping the Pig preserved and illuminated as part of their new mixed-use development projects surrounding nearby Diridon Station.

—Ben Leech
Executive Director, Preservation Action Council of San Jose
SF Neon Tender-Nob
Virtual Tour

From the gritty to the sublime, zigzag through the historic corridors of O’Farrell, Geary, Post, Sutter, and Bush Streets—with glowing vintage neon signs all along the way.

Nite Cap, 699 O’Farrell Street
2015 photo by Al Barna

This blue moon looks like an add-on to the tilting letters that spell Nite Cap, a well-loved cocktail lounge in the heart of the Tenderloin District. For years the only letters that illuminated were “NIT.” The long-time owner is gone, but the new owners reopened with the neon sign fully restored.
Follow an historic trail via neon and matchbooks with the Tenderloin Museum’s Katie Conry, and Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan of SF Neon, for an online journey of stunning visuals. You’ll see vintage matchbooks and neon signs from hotels, nightclubs, and late-night greasy spoons of the Tenderloin’s mid-century nightscape.

Hotel Senator, 519 Ellis Street
2014 photo by Al Barna

This one-hour virtual tour features imagery and stories of Tenderloin matchbooks associated with legacy businesses and neon signs researched by hosts Katie Conry, Executive Director of the Tenderloin Museum with Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan of SF Neon. Just like matchbooks, historic neon signs are a fascinating synecdoche of the small businesses they represent, and a window to the past explored through material culture. Tour includes iconic businesses remembered vividly through vintage ephemera, video clips, and historic photographs.
San Francisco’s signs and storefronts represent the intersection of architecture, aesthetics, and advertising. From the green glow of a diner in the Mission to the crimson letters of an Excelsior District drug store, the City has an impressive collection of vintage neon signs and storefronts that are under threat of closure during economic hardships.

St Francis Fountain, 2801 24th Street
2014 photo by Randall Ann Homan
This classic diner has been a corner landmark since 1918. The neon was installed in 1954. The current owners had the neon fully restored in 2002 after years of neglect. It is a rare example of a wrap-around sign on two sides of the building. This storefront is featured in an online tour of San Francisco’s historic and brilliant storefronts. Commentary by Martin Treu, author of Streets, Signs and Storefronts, along with Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan. In partnership with SF History Days. Grant for tour development was provided by San Francisco Heritage from the Alice Ross Cary fund.
SF Neon + Ghost Signs, Tenderloin Virtual Tour

The history and soul of the neighborhood shines through in this online tour of vintage signage found on the western end of the Tenderloin. This virtual tour features vintage neon signs and ghost signs (those faded hand-painted signs on the sides of buildings or on storefronts that advertise a product or business that is long gone). You will see a rich collection of photographs, video clips, maps, and historic research compiled by hosts Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan, SF Neon, and Kasey Smith, sfghostsigns.com creator and artist. Tour includes histories of unique small businesses that once thrived in the Tenderloin plus the legacy businesses that have survived against considerable odds.

The Gangway, 841 Larkin Street
1983 photo by Mark Carrodus

The Gangway was the oldest gay bar in the Tenderloin when it sadly closed its doors in 2018. We admire the beautiful back painting with a sophisticated depth in the elongated cocktail glass. At some point the neon tubes were removed and the sign was repainted lacking the same skill and inspiration. The new owners painted the sign black, but it can still be restored to its former artistry.
SF Neon Chinatown Virtual Tour

If you look above the storefronts of Grant Ave, you’ll discover forgotten clusters of vintage neon signs that once illuminated Chinatown. This tour includes some of the oldest signs in the City and although they may no longer light up, it is like a treasure hunt to discover these beautiful signs hidden in plain sight. The best are saved for last: the glowing signs at twilight.

Great Star Theatre, 636 Jackson Street
2016 photo by Al Barna

The Great Star Theater was built in 1925 as a Chinese opera house. It then became the place to see Hong Kong action films for nearly 50 years. This venue has been mostly shuttered for the past 15 years with attempts to bring it back to life by various owners. It is currently open only for occasional special events. The multi-talented John Law restored the vertical neon sign.
Grants for the 2020 Virtual Tours and Symposium, provided by San Francisco Heritage, from the Alice Ross Carey fund and by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Fiscal sponsorship and provided by the Tenderloin Museum.