

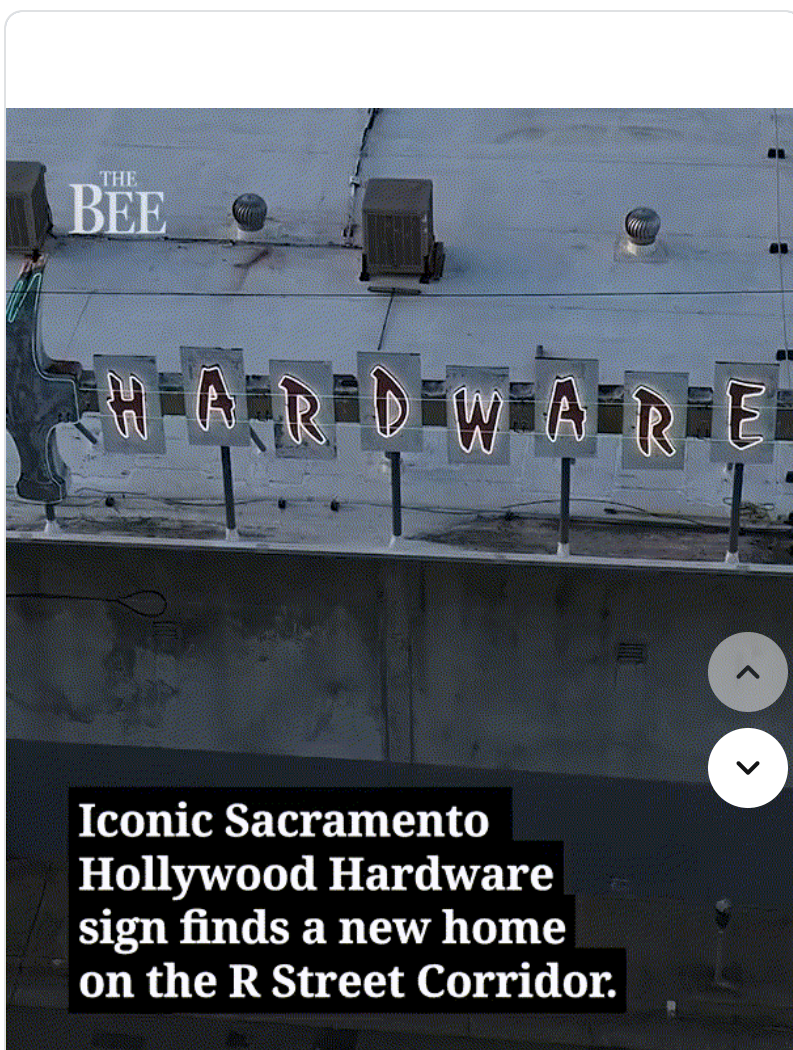
LOCAL

It was a Freeport Boulevard icon. Why the Hollywood Hardware sign moved downtown

By **Graham Womack**

June 20, 2026 7:00 AM

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Mike Heller couldn't fathom Hollywood Hardware's sign going to waste.

The neon sign, which spells out the word "hardware" along the handle of a giant hammer, stood for decades at the family-owned business at 5303 Freeport Blvd. in Sacramento's Hollywood Park neighborhood. After the store [closed in 2024](#), the sign remained in place before Heller and others helped to relocate it to the roof of Otto Construction near 3rd and R streets.

Heller, president of the development company Heller Pacific, is known for projects like the Ice Blocks and MARRS Building, among others. Across from Otto Construction, he's been renovating the Thomson-Diggs building into The Diggs, an apartment and retail complex. Residents will see the Hollywood Hardware sign, though that's not the only reason Heller wanted to save it.

"The original impetus was just seeing a really cool sign from a family that I knew," Heller said. "The thought of throwing a sign away like that just didn't make sense to me."

Why the Hollywood Hardware sign needed to move

Heller approached Ted Messner at a Land Park golf tournament in March 2025, asking what he was going to do with the Hollywood Hardware sign. It had been more than a year since the longtime business had closed.

Messner's late grandfather, who was also named Ted Messner, founded



A customer walks into Hollywood Hardware on Freeport Boulevard in Sacramento in January 2024 as the business prepares to shutter. PAUL KITAGAKI JR. *Sacramento Bee* file

There were fears in the community that a new owner of the land might sell the sign or discard it. Signs are generally not included in Sacramento’s local historic register unless they’re part of a building’s listing.

“We exempted it from review in the interest of seeing the sign preserved,” said Sean de Courcy, the city’s preservation director. “Hopefully we’ll put some

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size,” Smith wrote.

Golden 1 Center displays a collection of vintage neon signs from historic local businesses, such as Shakey’s Pizza and Tower Records, on loan from the [history center](#).

The Hollywood Hardware sign was erected at the end of 1959 or the beginning of 1960, Dennis Messner said, around the time the building was constructed. The business had been located just north on Freeport Boulevard prior to this.

Pacific Neon handled the sign’s fabrication. Dennis Messner said his father was involved in the creative process.

“My dad was kind of an artist at heart,” Dennis Messner said.

Heller approached the younger Ted Messner without a clear plan for what would happen with the sign if he took possession of it. “When Mike said he wanted it, I said, ‘What are you going to do?’” Ted Messner said. “He goes, ‘I don’t know yet, but I promise you it’ll be good.’ That’s good enough for me.”

The next step for Heller was finding a place where the sign could go. Heller said he tried to find a home for it on his property but lacked an ideal spot.

Instead, he turned to someone else with a connection to Hollywood Hardware.



Customer Lee Anderson, left, pays Dennis Messner for new keys at Hollywood Hardware on Freeport Boulevard in 2015, just after Messner and his family sold the business. PAUL KITAGAKI JR. *Sacramento Bee* file

How the sign got moved

At different points, Hollywood Hardware also had stores in the Parkway area of south Sacramento, West Sacramento and Foothill Farms. “The memory of us is still good,” Dennis Messner said. “We were a neighborhood store that took care of the neighborhood since we owned the buildings.”

The stores attracted loyal customers. One of them was Brieanne Otto, who fought

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From left, Michael Heller, Allison Otto and Ted Messner stand beneath the old Hollywood Hardware sign at its new location on the roof of Otto Construction near 3rd and R streets in Sacramento earlier this month. HG BIGGS hg.biggs@sacbee.com

The Thomson-Diggs Company was a hardware wholesaler that did some business with Hollywood Hardware. Heller asked Allison Otto what she thought, proposing that the Hollywood Hardware sign could pay homage to the Thomson-Diggs building's history.

Allison Otto initially played it cool.

“I was receptive to his proposition, but I had to make him sweat,” she said.

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The Messners gave the sign to Heller free of charge. Dennis Messner said that Otto Construction used to buy Christmas presents for its employees from Hollywood Hardware. Heller Pacific and Otto Construction split restoration costs for the sign of approximately \$100,000.

“I have to acknowledge Allison and her family on this,” Heller said. “They had no skin in this game to want to cooperate with me and I made an ask, not necessarily thinking it would be well-received. But not only did she do all that work and make that commitment but has contributed to the cost.”



The sun sets behind the Hollywood Hardware neon sign, which has found a new home at the Otto Construction headquarters, in downtown Sacramento earlier this month. HECTOR AMEZCUA hamezcua@sacbee.com

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“For us, it’s our commitment to Sacramento, just like Mike’s commitment to Sacramento,” Allison Otto said.

Meanwhile, Heller gets a sign that will help him in creating a sense of place at the western end of R Street. While much of the corridor has become a hub of shopping, eating and nightlife in recent decades, this hasn’t happened on the west side. “We made a presence in the middle of R Street and the other end of R Street, but it’s sleepy down there,” Heller said.

This could change as The Diggs, which is likely to welcome its first residents at the end of this year, approaches completion. Heller said he is close to securing a restaurant to operate in the building.

“We’re on the doorstep of making a deal with our restaurant,” Heller said.

“Having that sign there mattered to them because their customers are going to be able to have a drink or a glass of wine and look at a really classic piece of Sacramento history.”

Reactions to the Hollywood Hardware sign’s new location

Efrain Vallejo lives near Fruitridge Road and also remembers the sign's old location. The sign is now near the restaurant he co-owns with his brother, Vallejo’s, at the corner of 4th and S streets.

“It’s a historical sign — they should save it,” Vallejo said. “But I don’t know if it should be there.”

Others had more positive reactions, such as Sue Richards, owner of Crawford’s

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Sacramento City Councilmember Phil Pluckebaum said he was thrilled by the sign's preservation.

“Those signs are sort of unique pieces of art and sort of a part of our history in terms of how we used to do commercial display,” Pluckebaum said. “They’re really difficult to maintain and that’s why we don’t have as many of them.”

Also pleased was de Courcy, who said that when historic objects can be preserved to “continue to be enjoyed and experienced by the public, it’s good for the community and it’s good for historic preservation.”

For Dennis Messner, knowing that the Hollywood Hardware sign was atop Otto Construction made him happy.

“I got a real smile on my face,” he said. “It’s a tribute to my dad.”

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Glad to hear that the sign has a new life, even if it's not on the original building. Let's hope that an interesting proposal comes forward for the Freeport boulevard location!

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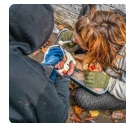
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