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Opera House offers new venue, catering on Main St.

By Amanda Hayes
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BUCKHANNON — In the late 1800s and early 1900s, opera houses were places where the community gathered for live entertainment.

That was the peak time period before movie theaters became more popular and many opera houses converted to theaters or closed up shop.

Today, live entertainment is in demand and a new venue on Main Street will help fill that need.

The Opera House recently celebrated a grand opening with owners C.J. and Jeannie Rylands and the Buckhannon-Up-

shur Chamber of Commerce. “Opera houses were gathering places,” C.J. Rylands said. “There have been three Opera Houses in Buckhannon. The original one was 1854.”

Rylands wanted to bring back the Opera House concept and make it work in the former G.C. Murphy location on Main Street.

Rylands said he sees the Opera House as hosting a combination of both reoccurring public events and private catering from business meetings to weddings, class reunions and Christmas parties.

“The main attraction is we



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C.J. Rylands cuts the ribbon at the Opera House with members of the Buckhannon-Upshur Chamber of Commerce.

▲ Opera House

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have the place but we also have the food, the liquor license and we are trying to package this as keeping it as simple as possible,” he said.

Events so far have included a B-UHS Class Reunion and a family wedding reception. On Oct. 19, the Opera House will host Shakespeare theatre troupe, The Rustic Mechanicals as they perform “Hamlet.”

The glass doors which front Main Street open into a large reception area or foyer that helps transition the patrons into the dining area of the space.

The dining area can seat up to 200 people at a mix of round and rectangular tables. There is a bar made out of cherry wood, exposed brick walls that are the original exterior walls of the buildings on either side and the original wood floor which was lightly sanded.

Modern elements such as

lighting that can be color coded for an event—think blue for the B-U Class reunion or a soft pink for a wedding reception—have also been added to the space.

The construction process took over five years with Rylands and his construction crew.

“We do all the work ourselves and we design as we go,” he said. “This creative, adaptive utilization of raw space is more time consuming and costly.”

But it also allows for customization and unique details

that may not happen in other areas.

Pointing to trim on the wall, Rylands said that may have taken three different people to come up with because of the different elements.

The Opera House is in what is originally the Crislip and Simpson Building built in 1893 and is accessed between the Chamber and Visitors Center and Citizens Bank of West Virginia.

G.C. Murphy operated a

retail store from 1928 through its closure in 1997, eventually expanding to the buildings on either side. The location was last used as Main Street Antiques until it moved across the street in 2012.

Rylands has a particular interest in keeping downtown vibrant and allowing locally-owned, authentic family-run businesses to thrive.

“Downtowns were the epicenter of culture and finance and everything,” he said.

“As those things get built up outside of downtown, we lose our prominence in those areas. What we are trying to do is bring back those culture and entertainment aspects to our core downtown which creates a sense of vibrancy that other retails can benefit from.

“If we get people living downtown, eating, drinking and shopping, then our prominence in these culture, entertainment and retail sectors rises a little bit.”