



Photo by Diana Haecker

The Nugget Inn has new owners.

New Owners Hope To See Nugget Inn Reopened Soon

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As of last week, the Nugget Inn officially has new owners. They have been working with the City of Nome to try to get 16 hotel rooms and the Gold Dust Saloon reopened ahead of next week's the busy Iditarod festivities.

As of Tuesday, the hotel was still waiting on its certificate of occupancy.

The Nugget Inn and the bar inside of it have been closed for more than a year. The building was damaged in September 2022 when a fire broke out next door, at the Bering Sea Restaurant, as ex-Typhoon Merbok battered Nome with high surf and strong winds.

The new owners are a group of three friends: retired pilot Marc Millican, Anchorage-based consultant Elizabeth Shea and musher Mille Porsild, who is currently racing in the Iditarod. The trio would come to Nome every year during the Iditarod. Last year, when Millican got into town, he suggested he meet them at Gold Dust Saloon for their first beer. When he learned it was still boarded up, he suggested they change that.

"It was kind of a joke at first," Shea said. "Over that week we kept walking past it and talking about it and joking about it at first because none of us have any experience doing anything like this. One of us is a dog musher. Another one is a retired pilot. And I'm a consultant that does not consult on anything like this. But we just kept talking about it, and we just kept thinking, why not? Why couldn't we do it?"

The sale only became official last week, but Shea said the group had been working on repairs over the last few months without having signed all the paperwork because they wanted to be pretty sure that they could get a certificate of occupancy.

They have mostly focused on the middle section of the building, which includes 16 rooms and the bar. Shea said they had to redo the sprinkler system and the safety hardware on the doors. They had to replace the fire extinguishers, exit signs, lights and alarms. They had to repair stairs and boilers. They've redone windows and painted the rooms. Shea said the City of Nome has been "amazingly helpful" in advising them about the process.

"The building is in remarkably good shape for not being open for that long," said City Manager Glenn Steckman. "I'm excited for the Nugget to get open because it's clearly needed—that hotel is clearly needed in the community."

When the hotel closed, Nome lost more than 40 hotel rooms. Just five years earlier, Nome had lost more than 30 hotel rooms when the Polaris Hotel burned down. Those recent losses have made housing harder to find for visitors coming to town for the Iditarod.

As of Tuesday morning, Steckman said that the certificate of occupancy was still in the hands of the Alaska State Fire Marshal's Office, though the City has recommended its approval.