New club is rising from the ashes for Crispus Attucks Legion post

By Ted Rozlofs
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-Paul Mayhue

Brick by brick, day by day, the dream of Crispus Attucks American Legion Club 59 is building toward a day some feared might never arrive.

Some 18 months after fire raged through the old club at 243 Commerce Ave. SW, members eagerly await the day in July or August when they can move into their new headquarters at the same location.

"I can't even begin to count the volunteer hours and the volunteer time that people have racked up in putting this thing together," said Paul Mayhue, post commander. "It's heartwarming to see the people come together like this."

Mayhue said dozens of new members have stepped forward or rejoined to help in the effort to build a new club.

"The membership continues to grow," Mayhue said, having jumped from about 100 people to at least 140 now.

Beyond that, Mayhue said, American Legion posts from around the city and state have chipped in with donations or fundraisers to help the club, whose members are predominately black.

He estimated donations at $40,000, including about $8,000 that was raised by an ox roast held by Creston Post 3023 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

"We felt that this would be an opportunity to show that the American Legion and the VFW were very close," said Creston Post Commander Paul Schwarz. "It's veterans helping veterans."

Schwarz praised members of the Crispus Attucks for pitching in and helping with the ox roast, and for volunteering to help with the roast again this year, even though it is for a different benefactor.

After bills were paid, insurance on the old building paid for only about $80,000 of the $350,000 cost of the new building, Mayhue said. A loan of $224,000 from Old Kent Bank, along with the determined spirit of the members, proved a critical step toward the reality of putting up a new building.

Larry Taylor, a Korean veteran who had belonged to the club since 1958, is one of those who decided to rejoin in the aftermath of the fire.

Assisting in the rebuilding are, from left, Earl Harper, John Hyatt, George May, Felix Gullick, Tom Gillespie, Paul Mayhue and Fred McFerren.