

[HOME \(HTTPS://THEFORUMNEWS.COM/\)](https://theforumnews.com/) [FEATURES \(HTTPS://THEFORUMNEWS.COM/ARTICLES.SEC-1-1-UPFRONT.HTML\)](https://theforumnews.com/articles.sec-1-1-upfront.html)

[HEALTH & FAMILY \(HTTPS://THEFORUMNEWS.COM/ARTICLES.SEC-10-1-HEALTH.HTML\)](https://theforumnews.com/articles.sec-10-1-health.html)

[HOME/LIFESTYLE \(HTTPS://THEFORUMNEWS.COM/ARTICLES.SEC-31-1-AT-HOME.HTML\)](https://theforumnews.com/articles.sec-31-1-at-home.html)

[PHOTO GALLERIES \(HTTPS://THEFORUMNEWS.COM/GALLERIES\)](https://theforumnews.com/galleries) [ARCHIVES \(HTTPS://NPAPER-WEHAA.COM/FORUM-NEWS/CS2\)](https://npaper-wehha.com/forum-news/cs2)

[CONTACT US \(HTTPS://THEFORUMNEWS.COM/FLEX-5-CONTACT-US.HTML\)](https://theforumnews.com/flex-5-contact-us.html)

[ADVERTISE \(HTTPS://THEFORUMNEWS.COM/FLEX-6-ADVERTISE.HTML\)](https://theforumnews.com/flex-6-advertise.html)

[PICK US UP \(HTTPS://THEFORUMNEWS.COM/FLEX-8-FORUM-DISTRIBUTION.HTML\)](https://theforumnews.com/flex-8-forum-distribution.html)

TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 2021

SAVING AN ARCHITECTURAL TREASURE

BY [Scott "Scooter" Anderson \(By-Author-270-1.Html\)](#)



Eric Hess begins effort to restore and rehabilitate B' Nai Zion Temple

At its zenith, the B'nai Zion Temple in downtown Shreveport served as a herald for the city's thriving Jewish community, complete with majestic Corinthian columns and detailed stonework on the facade. The grand pipe organ was set aglow as the sun cascaded through the beautiful stained glass windows, rumored to have been created by John La Farge, a one-time rival of Tiffany's in the world of stained glass.

It's fitting that an art glass studio has launched a grassroots campaign to save the building, which has fallen into disrepair after years of sitting abandoned.

Sanctuary Arts School and Glass Studio recently completed purchasing the building. Eric Hess, founder of Sanctuary Arts, had dreams for the building long before moving to Shreveport three years ago.

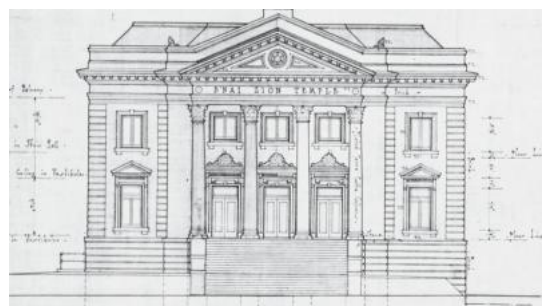
"I am from New Orleans," Hess said. "Saving historic buildings is huge there. I was kind of situated into loving older buildings and architecture and preserving history. I started coming back and forth to Shreveport about 29 years ago. I had an advertising firm in New Orleans. I saw the building, and I saw the Scottish Rite Temple. I thought, 'Why isn't this building being restored?' It's an amazing structure. One of the top three in the city."

Hess said that when he moved to Shreveport, it became evident to him that the temple could be lost without intervention.

"There was nothing being done with it," he said. "It was locked up with the former owner."

Early in his pursuit of the building, Hess found an ally in Wendy Bencoter, executive director of Shreveport Common.

"The historic B'nai Zion building is a city and a state treasure located at the gateway into Shreveport Common and downtown," Bencoter said. "We had front row seats to the ongoing deterioration. Like others before us, Shreveport Common and the city of Shreveport tried to acquire the property from the private owner with no success. It was hard to ignore that vultures had started roosting in the broken windows."



"When we first met Eric, we expected he would face the same obstacles. Even so, we did our best to fulfill our role as the redevelopment arm of Shreveport Common, to unite partners and help remove challenges for redevelopment. Eric has moved forward step by step with passion and tenacity, and an eagerness to do it the right way," Two years of research and work paid off as Sanctuary Arts took ownership.

"Now the process begins to secure building, fix the roof, drain the basement and protect it from further damage," Hess said.

At 802 Common St., the building was built in 1914 and designed by Edward Neild and Clarence Olschner. The Beaux Arts-style temple served as the home for the B'nai Zion congregation until 1956, when it outgrew the space and moved to Southfield Road.

The temple was added to the National Registry of Historic Places in 1994. The application to the registry described the building as "an architectural gem and an ornament to the city."

But time and Mother Nature have taken a toll on the building. The stonework exterior is crumbling in places. A family of buzzards is nesting behind the organ, Hess said. The February snowstorm extended damage to the roof and also compounded flooding and water damage throughout the temple.

Hess said it is the windows that are the most important part of the architecture, even though the origin story that La Forge created them is up for debate.

"From my research, I am thinking they were created by Jacoby, a company out of St. Louis," Hess said. "They did a lot of windows here in Shreveport. La Farge is what's on the National Register. All of his glass had been up north. I think he might have been contracted to do handprinted sections."

Hess said it was fortunate that Sanctuary Glass took ownership of the building before the storm hit.

"With the recent snowstorm, the weight of that on the corner of the building caused the roof to separate," Hess said. "We need to raise the roof and secure the building. Then we can launch a capital campaign to move it forward and restore the building."

Hess said he has been told the building is not beyond saving.

"Here's the good news. The bones of the roof are excellent," he said. "Just a few problem areas. The bones of the building are fabulous, too. We don't have to remove the glass. There are some caning issues. We can repair and replace some glass."

Hess is inviting the entire Shreveport community to join the effort to restore the building to its former glory.

Hess created the "Save the B'nai Zion Temple" Facebook page as a place to inform the public and recruit volunteers to assist with the efforts. Among the page's early successes:

- **May 26 Facebook post:** "Sanctuary Arts School and Glass Studio is spearheading an effort to save the Temple. Tomorrow (Thursday) at 1 p.m., the roof of the temple will be temporarily sealed to eliminate most of the water intrusion that has caused so much damage. We are lucky that Wendy Benscoter from the Shreveport Common was able to get Randy Mangrum from Storer Construction Solutions to get us a lift to bring roofers from Bayou State Roofing up to the roof to do the repairs. Both companies are doing this for free, and we are so grateful. Just the first step in saving this building."

- **May 27 Facebook post:** "Today was a wonderful day for the Temple. The area of the roof where the worse damage is was taped, so it will be high and dry for a while as we prepare to save the building. Thanks to Matt Varnell and Bayou State Roofing, Wendy Benscoter, Randy Mangrum & Storer Construction Solutions and Ahern Rentals that loaned us the lift. This is what it is like when the community comes together for a cause. Stay with us as Sanctuary Arts School and Glass Studio and our community work to save this historic gem!"

- **June 8 Facebook post:** "Cody Wommack to the rescue. Cody is volunteering to drain the flooded basement of the B'nai Zion Temple. Thank you so much, Cody!" "It's really great how community is coming together," Hess said. "We could never do this alone. It takes a village. It will take a village to save the building."

"It's going to take everybody. Not just deep pockets and foundations. It's like a pie. You need everybody. Need people to give money, even smallest amounts. You need people who can do in-kind and volunteerism. It's all of that. And it's all equally important. I don't think it's as meaningful unless everybody participates."

Hess said he would unveil more of his plans for the building after the restoration efforts are more underway. But he said saving the building is part of the community as a whole.

Benscoter said Shreveport Common will continue to support Hess in his efforts.

"The B'nai Zion building is an architectural and cultural gem," she said. "If left to self-demolish, the hole in our landscape and loss of its history would be considerable. The first step is to preserve the building. As for its future, the Shreveport Common Vision Plan calls for creating places that celebrate the history and culture, add creativity and spaces for artists, are sustainable and are for the community. We can now look forward to the hope of that to come for our neighbors and for our city."

Hess wants all of Shreveport to catch hold of the vision.

"We want the community as a whole to adopt this and become a part," he said. "It's really important to me. It's really going to be the city's building. It is going to be a community center. A sanctuary is a safe place for all people. It doesn't matter about the -isms. It's going to be a community center that is going to reach out and provide a sanctuary."

Sanctuary Arts School is a 501 (c) (3) Louisiana corporation and operates exclusively for educational and charitable purposes. Sanctuary Arts promotes diversity and inclusion and provides ongoing classes in the glass arts, including glass blowing, kiln casting, sand casting and hot sculpting.



For more information on Sanctuary Arts and the effort to save the B'nai Zion temple, visit sanctuaryartsschool.org or the Save the B'nai Temple Facebook page.

Storer Construction Solutions provided a lift for workers to reach the roof. Cody Wommack volunteered to drain the flooded basements. Roofers are making repairs for free.



ALSO FROM SCOTT "SCOOTER" ANDERSON

[Planting Seeds Of Renewal \(https://theforumnews.com/article-4337-planting-seeds-of-renewal.html\)](https://theforumnews.com/article-4337-planting-seeds-of-renewal.html)

[Moving Bossier City FORWARD \(https://theforumnews.com/article-4318-moving-bossier-city-forward.html\)](https://theforumnews.com/article-4318-moving-bossier-city-forward.html)

[Nothing Like a Sharp Dressed Man \(https://theforumnews.com/article-4247-nothing-like-a-sharp-dressed-man.html\)](https://theforumnews.com/article-4247-nothing-like-a-sharp-dressed-man.html)

[Headquarters Unacceptable \(https://theforumnews.com/article-4226-headquarters-unacceptable.html\)](https://theforumnews.com/article-4226-headquarters-unacceptable.html)

[Bayou Grand Construction \(https://theforumnews.com/article-4205-bayou-grand-construction.html\)](https://theforumnews.com/article-4205-bayou-grand-construction.html)

[Trail Of Recovery \(https://theforumnews.com/article-4207-trail-of-recovery.html\)](https://theforumnews.com/article-4207-trail-of-recovery.html)

[Uncovering Blight \(https://theforumnews.com/article-4185-uncovering-blight.html\)](https://theforumnews.com/article-4185-uncovering-blight.html)

[Health Journey \(https://theforumnews.com/article-4171-health-journey.html\)](https://theforumnews.com/article-4171-health-journey.html)

[Road to Sainthood \(https://theforumnews.com/article-4147-road-to-sainthood.html\)](https://theforumnews.com/article-4147-road-to-sainthood.html)

[Take a Hike \(https://theforumnews.com/article-4151-take-a-hike.html\)](https://theforumnews.com/article-4151-take-a-hike.html)



[https://clicking.wehaaserver.com/?keyplane=YSPBGQABsRvUdoaxcggfzLREPxSfbpKWFm2kGCpV%2BmAsMG3VbE3bHAK2qiCWurMJ6XpUPahNjPmNIsvMTUyZ2UGFczyGMy0ggYURwGvJAdA%](https://clicking.wehaaserver.com/?keyplane=YSPBGQABsRvUdoaxcggfzLREPxSfbpKWFm2kGCpV%2BmAsMG3VbE3bHAK2qiCWurMJ6XpUPahNjPmNIsvMTUyZ2UGFczyGMy0ggYURwGvJAdA%3D)