

# Theater renovation shows sign of completion

OCT. 11, 2010 – 9:40 AM



## NORTH PARK

It's been five years since the historic Birch North Park Theatre was restored to its former splendor and reopened at University Avenue near 29th Street.

The \$12-million refurbishment, along with an influx of new bars and restaurants nearby, has become a significant factor in the neighborhood's transformation. But until last week there remained something askew at the home of Lyric Opera.

“For five years the theater was missing a historic replica of the original marquee,” said Patrick Edwards, who started his antique furniture refinishing business here 40 years ago. “What you see now is an exact re-creation. I love it. It's about time.”

The new vertical sign, heralded as the capstone of the 82-year-old theater's conversion, was paid for through a \$163,000 loan from the San Diego Redevelopment Agency to owner and manager, Lyric Opera San Diego.

Mayor Jerry Sanders, at a ceremony touting the 730-seat theater's cultural contributions to the city, said its continued operation support both local arts and the North Park community.

The latest effort also includes improvements to the box office, restrooms, basement and wheelchair lift.

Councilman Todd Gloria, whose district includes the theater, said the work would help preserve the site, reduce operating costs and enhance the curb appeal of the building.

"We are all proud of the vibrancy Birch North Park Theatre brings to the neighborhood," he said.

Leon Natker, general director for Lyric Opera, characterized the marquee's dedication as a long time coming. His organization is celebrating its 32nd anniversary bringing accessible opera and musical theater to San Diego.

Said Natker, looking up at the sign: "It's glorious."