



By Matthew McCoy  
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**T**he Dreamland Ballroom has been a part of my life for the whole of my life. Kerry McCoy bought the building in 1990, the year I was born. By the way, my name is Matthew McCoy; Executive Director of the Friends of Dreamland, employee of **Flagandbanner.com**, and middle son to Kerry and Grady McCoy.

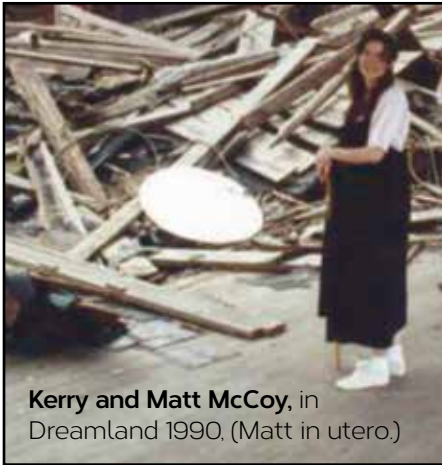
Growing up, I took the third-floor ballroom of the Arkansas Flag and Banner building for granted. A big old room. Beautiful? Sure, but ultimately my parents' work place. The place I spent

those incredibly boring days in anyone's childhood, when school wasn't in session, your parents still had to go to work, and you had to find some way to entertain yourself. And be quiet about it. Luckily for me and my three other siblings, we had this big, empty, kind of dangerous ballroom to help whittle away those hours that seem to go on forever when one is that young.

For most of my life, I remember the first two floors of the building being intact. I remember people working at desks, having meetings in meeting rooms, long tables dedicated to sewing large flags, screen printers, digital printers, all the hustle-and-

bustle of a work place. But the top floor was empty and quiet. The floors were not reliable, the safe spots denoted by colored flag scraps, and the mezzanines held up by two by four "columns" wedged into place.

Around 2009, Kerry decided to take on the renovation of the third floor. Unable to acquire a loan, due to the unmarketable nature of a vacant, borderline decrepit, old room, she founded the non-profit Friends of Dreamland (FOD), dedicated to the restoration of the Dreamland Ballroom. This status made grant funding available and donations possible by other old building buffs



like my mom.

However, the ballroom restoration was a bigger task than anyone anticipated. But its potential was even bigger. In 2012, FOD hosted their annual fundraiser, Dancing into Dreamland, in the ballroom for the first time. The previous years' fundraisers had been held at the Little Rock Governor's Mansion. It didn't take long for the Board of Directors and Kerry to find one very large problem with hosting any event in the historic space... no elevator.

Not being ADA compliant, the liability that FOD, **FlagandBanner.com**, and my family assumed every time there was an event in the ballroom, regularly put my parents into near-cardiac arrest. So, eventually, Dancing into Dreamland was the only event we continued to host in this incredible venue.

In February of 2017, I

moved back to Little Rock after attending college in Fayetteville, AR and began working at the family flag shop. The ballroom's condition had improved from when I was in high school. Being slightly more mature, I realized that untapped potential my mother always talked about. I began to familiarize myself with the history of this place and this district of Little Rock, and I was blown away. Like many of the people in the area, I had no idea what a jewel this building was to downtown

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**"I put the possibility of being awarded this \$499,668 grant out of my mind."**

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Little Rock, although I had much less of an excuse—essentially being raised in it.

FOD was doing a great job slowly restoring and maintaining the space, but the time had come to expedite the process. A friend of FOD contacted us in the spring of 2017 about a grant, a grant that had Dreamland written all over it: a Civil Rights Preservation Grant awarded by the National Parks Service. I knew this was my chance. I volunteered

to do all the paper work, facilitate meetings, contact contractors to make bids and manage files, anything to make it happen. With the help of an amazing team of people, we applied in October...the day the grant application was due! After that, it was all waiting and hoping.

February came and went with no word from Washington. I put the possibility of being awarded this grant out of my mind. Then, this past March, I received a voicemail on my personal cell phone. A month overdue, it was a call I didn't anticipate. I listened to the message, eyes widening, as I realized what the woman on the other end was saying: "Congratulations! We are calling on behalf of the National Parks Service to inform you that Friends of Dreamland has been awarded \$499,668.00..." I jumped out of my chair and ran down the hall to my mother's office. Fumbling with my phone to replay the message for her, I put it on speaker and watched her face as it registered with her what the lady was saying. She screamed and jumped out of her chair, ecstatic. A lifetime goal—my lifetime at least—finally realized. 🇺🇸