

LOCAL

## An alien friend, real clothing and deterioration: What artists discovered restoring Billy Bud in Sheboygan

*Artists discovered a small creature on Billy Bud's shoulder, a character named 'Upnose' created by Bud Wall.*



**Alex Garner**

Sheboygan Press

Published 5:08 a.m. CT Sept. 6, 2024 | Updated 5:08 a.m. CT Sept. 6, 2024

**SHEBOYGAN** – Billy Bud is back atop the Henry Jung Apartments smokestack.

He was reinstalled Sept. 5 after being restored at South High School over the summer. Bud was removed from the smokestack last year after it was deemed in poor condition and a safety hazard. It was shortened from 90 feet to 50 feet.

Bud was displayed at the Sheboygan County Museum over Labor Day weekend, where visitors got a closer look at the chimney sweeper, seen only along Sheboygan's skyline the last 30 years. The accompanying exhibit gave insight into the restoration process and history of the statue and artist Bud Wall.

### Restoration artists include students, teacher and designer

- Craig Grabhorn, designer and build studio artist
- Brian Sommersberger, South High art teacher
- Tom Uebelherr, professor emeritus at University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Sheboygan Campus
- Karol Bonilla, South High art student
- Nicholas Weser, South High art student
- Tyler Weser, South High art alumni

## **Chimney sweep arrived in 'rough shape' at South High**

Billy Bud was made of fiber glass, resin, a mold of a person's body and metal armature. The statue also had actual clothing, pants, boots and a jacket plastered on it, possibly with epoxy resin.

Grabhorn said the statue was in “rough shape,” dirty, tattered and worn down to fiber glass.

The restoration team lacked archival photos of what Bud looked like when he was commissioned to go atop the former Henry Jung Shoe Co. Building. They researched Wall’s previous work and looked to the statue for clues to its former glory. They color matched Bud's pants from some blue spots.

“We're just trying to piece it all together,” Sommersberger said.

## **Restoration called for sanding, sculpting materials and painting**

The restoration team sanded the statue for about two weeks to create a smooth surface. After that, the team used different sculpting materials, like clays and epoxy, to rebuild detail areas that disappeared, like a pant pocket. Bud was repainted with layers of resin and UV coating. A few support cables were replaced, too.

It’s more typical for exterior sculptures, especially those vulnerable to weather conditions atop buildings, to be made from cast metals, Grabhorn said. Those materials can be expensive.

For this project, Sommersberger said the team didn’t have “many other options than just trying to restore it with the materials that it was made from.”

Dan Fosdick, vice president of Heartland Properties, Inc., which owns the Henry Jung Apartments, said the company paid roughly \$20,000 for restoration expenses.

## **What's on Billy Bud's shoulder? An alien called 'Upnose.'**

The most interesting discovery was an alien on Bud’s shoulder named “Upnose,” a character from one of Wall’s stories. In the 1980s, he began creating characters and writing scripts in the hopes of making animated movies. The Upnose character is a carbon-breathing alien from “Galaxy Upthere.”

Sommersberger said he feels he learned more about Wall through restoring the chimney sweep and wishes they could've met, "knowing that you're bringing his work back to life in a way."

## **A summer-long project**

The restoration process took about two and a half months. Bud was delivered to South High mid-June and the restoration team finished at the beginning of August.

## **Too many unknowns led to initial reluctance to restore**

Bud was removed from the smokestack last fall, but Sommersberger said there was difficulty finding someone to restore it. Two drawbacks were a lack of archival materials to use as guidance and the unknown extent of deterioration.

Sommersberger and Grabhorn previously worked on a project with South High students shaping and fiberglassing surfboards. They felt equipped to take on the Bud project.

"I remember in elementary school hearing that it (Billy Bud) was going to be going up," Sommersberger said. "I've been looking at this sculpture for a long time and knowing that the community wants it back up and nobody wants to take on the project was a big motivator for me."

Grabhorn was drawn to the project because of the statue's iconic and historic impact in the area and his desire to create work for the community.

"To put something that I appreciated up that disappeared means a lot to me," he added.

**The latest on Memorial Hospital site:** Former Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center site is now bare. What happens next?

## **Two South High students were involved in restoring Bud**

South High offered independent study credit to the two students who contributed to the restoration project.

Sommersberger learned Wall invited college students to work on the Bud statue when he was teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. He wanted to replicate that experience for students at South.

## **Billy Bud returns bright in color**

Still with the original chimney sweeper, Bud is back in color. He has a gray jacket, red shirt, blue pants and a black hat, gloves and boots. Upnose has new paint too: bright yellow, green and red.

## **Still vulnerable to sunlight and weather on shortened smokestack**

The hope is Billy Bud won't need further restoration for the next 20 to 30 years, though that is dependent on weather conditions and UV radiation impacts.

***Have a story tip?** Contact Alex Garner at 224-374-2332 or [agarner@gannett.com](mailto:agarner@gannett.com). Follow her on X (formerly Twitter) at [@alexx\\_garner](https://twitter.com/alexx_garner).*