Philco Neon Sign

2001-13-1

Museum purchase

The striking Philco neon sign in the museum’s atrium dates back to the late 1930s, a relic from Philco's era as a prominent radio manufacturer. It’s the museum’s most photographed item, acquired in a memorable fashion. Shortly after opening, director Brian Belanger stumbled upon it at an antiques shop in Rockford, Illinois, still in pristine condition in its original crate. Captivated but short on funds, Brian documented it and the shop owner’s details.

Back at the museum, board members shared Brian's enthusiasm. Knowing donor Rodger Nye’s passion for Philco radios, they strategized a purchase. Rodger negotiated the price down to the shop owner’s acquisition cost of $2500, citing the museum’s non-profit status. Rodger pledged the sum if Brian could retrieve it.

Brian returned with determination, but the sign's dimensions exceeded his minivan's capacity. Undeterred, he outfitted his vehicle with a trailer hitch and rented a trailer. A sign rigging company helped install it in the atrium, where it has dazzled visitors ever since, even earning recognition in *Washingtonian Magazine*.