RESOLUTION-EXHIBIT A
La Casa Pizzeria Neon Sign
LANDMARKS HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION

RESOLVED BY THE LANDMARKS HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF OMAHA:

WHEREAS, Joel Hahn, is the owner of the La Casa Pizzeria Neon Sign, at 4432 Leavenworth Street; and,

WHEREAS, the owner requested on August 22, 2003, that the La Casa Pizzeria Neon Sign be designated a Landmark under the City of Omaha’s Landmarks Heritage Preservation Ordinance; and,

WHEREAS, the La Casa Pizzeria Neon Sign is significant as an excellent example of neon signage; and,

WHEREAS, the La Casa Pizzeria Neon Sign, constructed in 1957, is one of Omaha’s oldest extant neon signs; and,

WHEREAS, the La Casa Pizzeria Neon Sign is a prominent visual landmark; and,

WHEREAS, the La Casa Pizzeria Neon Sign exhibits an exceptionally high degree of historic integrity; and,

WHEREAS, this case application and supporting data are attached hereto as exhibits, and are incorporated herein by this reference.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LANDMARKS HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF OMAHA:

THAT, the La Casa Pizzeria Neon Sign, 4432 Leavenworth Street, be designated a Landmark of the City of Omaha.
Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission
Application for Landmark
or Landmark Heritage District

1. **Name of Structure:** La Casa neon sign

2. **Location / Address:** 4432 Leavenworth Street

3. **Applicant:**

   name:  Joel Hahn, La Casa Pizzaria
   address:  4432 Leavenworth Street
   phone:  402-556-6464

4. **Classification:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>district</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>X occupied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building(s)</td>
<td>private</td>
<td>□ unoccupied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structure</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>□ work in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>site</td>
<td>public acquisition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X object</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   **Present Use**
   - □ agriculture
   - X commercial
   - □ educational
   - □ entertainment
   - □ government
   - □ industrial
   - □ military
   - □ vacant
   - □ museum
   - □ park
   - □ private residence
   - □ religious
   - □ scientific
   - □ transportation
   - □ other (explain)

5. **Owners of Property:**

   name:  Joel Hahn
   address:  La Casa Pizzaria, Inc. 4432 Leavenworth
   phone:  402-556-6464

6. **Legal Description:**

   MC CORMICKS 2ND ADD LOT 10 BLOCK 7 LOTS 9 & 100 X 127.25
7. Historic Description and Significance: Please provide as thorough a description as possible. This should include, but is not limited to, architectural styles and features, site elements, landscaping/urban design elements; architects, builders, and owners. Copies of architectural drawings, photos and similar documents are encouraged. Include a statement explaining why the time/property/district is historically significant. The Landmarks Commission staff will assist you in filling out this portion if necessary. Use additional sheets if necessary.

"Pepp" the La Casa neon sign, photo by Rob Parolek, December 20, 2002.

Architect: n/a
Built: 1957
Fabricators: attr. to Neon Products Inc., Omaha
Style: freestanding neon sign

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY STATEMENT:

The La Casa neon sign, located at 45th and Leavenworth Streets in mid-town Omaha was constructed in 1957. A freestanding, double-sided neon sign, it is located at the edge of the parking lot of the La Casa restaurant, a third-generation Omaha family business. The La Casa sign is an excellent example of neon signage (National Register Criterion C: Architecture) and is one of Omaha's oldest extant neon signs. A prominent visual local landmark, the sign exhibits an exceptionally high degree of historic integrity.

Application cont'd

Signature of owner

Please return the completed application to: Preservation Administrator, Omaha Planning Department
1819 Farnam St., Omaha, NE 68183

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

On its free-standing metal pole, the La Casa sign is approximately 15 feet tall and is located on the north side of Leavenworth Street, a major east-west Omaha thoroughfare. The adjacent La Casa Restaurant, like sign, reflects the area's evolution into a commercial strip. The south side of Leavenworth between 42nd and west to Saddlecreek Road, is still predominantly residential with one story bungalows and gable roofed, temple-front houses. The La Casa restaurant (not part of the current nomination) originated in a small gable roofed frame house; the business opened on June 8, 1953. Although the restaurant building has continued to evolve through time, the original gable roof is still visible.

Constructed in 1957, the sign features a rotund caricature of a "troubadour", Peppi, who plucks a mandolin. The figure, which measures approximately 8 feet in height, has a drooping handlebar mustache, green hat, red shirt, loose tie and royal blue trousers. The sign's details are outlined in various shades of neon: the hat and trousers in blue; the hair, face, mustache, fingers and mandolin in both orange and yellow; while the tie is outlined with green neon. The feet rest on a rectangular metal base that measures approximately four feet by two feet and features the words "La Casa" in pink neon exaggerated modern letters. Peppi "plucks" the mandolin; this is the only moving feature of the sign.

Although the sign has been repainted through time, the colors of the green hat and red shirt have remained constant. The trousers however, were originally black. Overall, the sign exhibits an exceptional degree of integrity and has been well maintained since its date of construction.
Family/Restaurant History:  (The following history of the La Casa family restaurant is derived from the La Casa website: www.lacasapizzaria.com)

In 1953, Joe Patane, a Sicilian immigrant decided to venture into the pizza business. Pizza was in its commercial infancy and Joe, having seen pizza in New York City had a feeling it would become a popular food for all Americans. He decided to make his pizza Neapolitan style, named for its region of origin in Naples, Italy.

Joe and his wife Nellie bought a house in Omaha at 45th and Leavenworth Streets. Largely through his own efforts, Joe renovated the house into a small establishment he named La Casa, meaning “the house” in Italian.

The original La Casa opened on June 8, 1953 with seating for 50 people. On that first night, Joe and his family ran out of food half way through the evening, forcing an earlier than usual closing. The growing crowds indicated that Joe’s hunch about pizza and its popularity were correct.

In 1957 the restaurant was expanded to its current size. La Casa now seats 104 people in the dining room and 40 in the lounge. The basement party room is available to seat an additional 55 people. In 1965 La Casa opened a second location at 82nd and Grover, which was designated “La Casa West.”

Today two of Joe and Nellie’s daughters and five of their grandchildren operate the two locations. The family invites you to share in part of Omaha’s restaurant heritage known as La Casa.

Setting/Context

The La Casa neon sign, located along Leavenworth Street, is one example of the street’s evolution into a commercial strip. From 42nd Street to Saddlecreek Road in the 1920’s and 30’s, the area was predominantly residential with one story bungalows or gable roofed “temple front” houses, with scattered small scale commercial structures. Leavenworth developed into an automobile oriented commercial strip beginning in the 1940’s with the construction of a large “modern” Safeway grocery store at the northwest corner of 42nd and Leavenworth. Constructed in 1942, the glazed brick building had a corner entrance facing southeast with a stair step fluted parapet with a large neon Safeway sign.¹

In c. 1960 the Safeway store closed; it was soon converted to its current usage, Charlie Graham's auto-body repair and service garage. By c. 1963 the stepped parapet had a new sign. Attached to the façade the sign has a background of blue/gray metal, which measures approximately 8 x 8 feet. A red neon c. 1960 sedan is outlined in pink neon; the car body alternately "crumples" then straightens. Beneath the car is the name "Charlie Graham" in pink neon script; the letter "G" extends below the gray background.

¹ Omaha World Herald, “New Safeway” June 7, 1942.
Approximately one block south of the La Casa sign on the same side Leavenworth is Bronco's drive-in with its freestanding neon sign. A local chain, the first hamburger stand opened in 1959 at 30th Street and Ames Avenue in north Omaha (no longer extant). The Leavenworth location opened in c. 1963.\(^2\) The one story restaurant with drive-up window has a red metal scalloped roofline. In keeping with modern design along commercial strips, the building features full-length plate glass windows on the south, east and west facades, white enamel brick and stainless steel interior. The highly visible and well-lit interior features a vaulted ceiling with florescent tube lighting oriented east-west.

Adjacent to the building is a large two-sided neon sign that faces east-west on Leavenworth. The Bronco sign is approximately 25 feet in height on two metal poles. The sign features the torso of a blue-eyed cowboy with hat, neck kerchief, and lasso. The cowboy's torso "rests" on a large rectangular shaped back lit sign box with the word BRONCO in black letters. The arm located closest to Leavenworth Street alternately flashes and the rope encircles a lower circular sign that contains a back-lit cowboy on a bucking bronco. Originally this circular element contained the words "Hamburgers 5 cents." Beneath the cowboy is another rectangular element with the word "Hamburgers" in pink neon script; beneath this, also in pink neon script is the phrase:

"Serv 'urself
and Save"

For almost 50 years, the La Casa sign and its later Leavenworth Street counterparts have been significant visual Omaha landmarks that also represent important local businesses. As a third-generation family business, the La Casa Restaurant has attracted a loyal clientele since it opened in 1953.

**History Significance: Neon**

French inventor George Claude has been credited with producing the first neon light, in France in 1910. Near the end of the 19th century, neon, an inert colorless gas, had been discovered. When the gas was electrically charged in a glass tube, it glowed orange red. Other gases such as mercury, argon, and helium produced different colors when electrically charged; different colored tubes would produce different colors. The word "neon," however, soon became the generic term to describe any brightly colored gas discharge lamp that is bent into letters or designs. The first neon sign in America, the word “Packard” spelled out in orange, was installed at a Los Angeles automobile showroom in 1923. It was not however, until Claude’s principal patents expired in 1932 that neon signs became predominant in cities and small town commercial districts.\(^3\)

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\(^2\) Interview with Steve Barnes, Bronco CEO by author, May 2001.

In 1933, neon was used extensively at the Chicago World’s Fair, also known as “A Century of Progress.” Fair buildings were constructed in the streamline moderne style and showcased new and emergent technologies such as prefabrication and neon lighting.⁴ According to the official guidebook:⁵

A new kind of illumination has come, and in the Century of Progress it is used in greater profusion than ever the world has seen.

At the Fair, over 75,000 feet of neon tubing was installed. The Electric Building, which had over a mile and a half alone, also included an area where fairgoers could see neon being fabricated.⁶

In the 1930’s neon signage was often incorporated into existing commercial buildings; flush to the main façade, or as projecting or hanging signs. As automobile oriented commercial strips emerged in the 1940’s and 1950’s, new architectural forms resulted. Businesses tended to be in single story buildings, set back from the street or highway. These auto related businesses were “very much dependent upon large free-standing signs out front” to attract customers both day and night.⁷

The La Casa neon sign is significant at the local level as a well-preserved example of a free-standing neon sign along an early automobile oriented commercial strip. The sign is also significant for its association with a third-generation Omaha family business.

Author: Carol Ahlgren, August 13, 2003.

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⁴ Jakle, City Lights, p. 162.
⁷ Jakle, pp.239-240.
November 4, 2003
C3-03-213

Honorable President

and Members of the City Council,

The attached Ordinance approves the Local Landmark designation for the LaCasa Pizzaria neon sign located at 4432 Leavenworth Street. The applicant is Joel Hahn.

CASE DESCRIPTION: The purpose of this request is to provide Local Landmark designation to the LaCasa Pizzaria neon sign, which is located at 4432 Leavenworth Street.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: Approval.

SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY: The Planning Board held a public hearing on this request October 1, 2003. Full summary of proceedings is attached.

PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION: Approval, as recommended by the Planning Department, 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert C. Peters
Planning Director

Mayor's Office

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Memo

September 11, 2003

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Robert Peters, Planning Director
SUBJECT: Case # C3-03-213
Landmarks Case # H1-03-18; Landmark Designation
La Casa Pizzaria Neon Sign, 4432 Leavenworth Street

At the September 10, 2003 meeting of the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, the applicant and owner of the La Casa Pizzaria Neon Sign, Joel Hahn, requested local landmark designation for the La Casa Pizzaria Neon Sign, 4432 Leavenworth Street. The public hearing held at this meeting resulted in a recommendation for approval of the request.

According to Chapter 24, O.M.C., Section 24-59, we hereby transmit this proposal to the City Planning Board, and request that you consider the degree of conformity or nonconformity with the Master Plan of the City of Omaha.

Analysis: The La Casa neon sign, located at 45th and Leavenworth Streets in mid-town Omaha was constructed in 1957. A freestanding, double-sided neon sign, it is located at the edge of the parking lot of the La Casa restaurant, a third-generation Omaha family business. The La Casa sign is an excellent example of neon signage (National Register Criterion C: Architecture) and is one of Omaha’s oldest extant neon signs. A prominent visual local landmark, the sign exhibits an exceptionally high degree of historic integrity.

The preservation of historic neon signage has been an important aspect of historic preservation activity in cities across the country for many years. Standards in Omaha’s preservation ordinance provide for the landmark designation of structures such as neon signs when they have “historical and cultural importance, interest or value, as part of the development, history, heritage or cultural characteristics of the city”. The landmarks commission considers the La Casa neon sign to meet the standards for designation. These standards are also stated in the portion of the master plan that deals with historic preservation, “A Comprehensive Program for Historic Preservation in Omaha”. Therefore the department finds this request for local Landmark designation to be in conformance with the preservation element of the Master Plan. In addition, the Concept Element of the master plan states: “Omaha’ssound existing building stock, older neighborhoods and older business districts should be conserved and enhanced.” The La Casa restaurant and neon sign are in one of these types of older business areas.

Recommendation:
Approval.
The Planning Department considers this request to be in conformance with the Master Plan.
C3-03-213

ORDINANCE NO 36453

AN ORDINANCE to designate the LaCasa Pizzaria neon sign at 4432 Leavenworth Street as a landmark pursuant to the Landmark Heritage Preservation Ordinance of the City of Omaha

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OMAHA

Section 1 That the LaCasa Pizzaria neon sign at 4432 Leavenworth Street, which is on the following described land, to wit

Lots 9 and 10, Block 7, McCormick's 2nd Addition

is hereby deemed historically significant and worthy of recognition for the reasons cited in Landmark Heritage Preservation Resolution attached hereto as Exhibit "A" and made a part hereof by reference

Section 2 That the "Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Buildings", as may be from time to time amended, are hereby adopted as the design standards to be applied in the enforcement of this ordinance and Chapter 24, Article II, of the Omaha Municipal Code

Section 3 That the LaCasa Pizzaria neon sign is hereby designated as a landmark pursuant to Section 24-61 of the Omaha Municipal Code and hereby subject to all of the provisions of this Ordinance and Chapter 24, Article II, of the Omaha Municipal Code
ORDINANCE NO. 36453

Section 4 That this Ordinance shall be in full force and take effect fifteen (15) days from and after the date of its passage.

INTRODUCED BY COUNCILMEMBER

[Signature]

APPROVED BY

[Signature] 12/14/03

MAYOR OF THE CITY OF OMAHA

PASSED DEC - 2 2003 1-0

DATE

ATTEST.

[Signature] 12/14/03

CITY CLERK OF THE CITY OF OMAHA

DATE

APPROVED AS TO FORM

[Signature] 10/22/03

CITY ATTORNEY

DATE

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the original document now on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

[Duster Brown, City Clerk, City of Omaha]
ORDINANCE NO. 36353

AN ORDINANCE to designate the LaCasa Pizzana neon sign at 4432 Leavenworth Street as a landmark pursuant to the Landmark Heritage Preservation Ordinance of the City of Omaha

PRESENTED TO COUNCIL

1st Reading NOV - 4 2003 - Hearing
Arkansas pursuant to City Council Rule 16.1

Hearing NOV 18 2003 - Overd

Final Reading DEC - 2 2003
Passed 7-0

BUSTER BROWN
City Clerk

PUBLICATIONS

PUBLICATION OF HEARING
Date 11-7-03

PUBLICATION OF ORDINANCE
Date 12-10-03