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The Big Orange is back! How the New Year's icon was saved for a climb to hotel's top



Rising from the dead, the neon Big Orange will scale the side of a downtown Miami hotel after all to ring in the New Year.

Organizers had said Wednesday that the beloved flashy orange would be replaced by a digital replica for the annual countdown tradition. But on Thursday, plans were on again to have the physical Big Orange rise to the top of the Hotel InterContinental.

The 2,000-pound neon sign hasn't climbed the hotel — a Miami twist to the New York ball drop — the past three years due to COVID and other issues.

This week, Big Orange creator Steve “Mr. Neon” Carpenter told news outlets that the mascot wouldn't climb the building again this New Year's because of logistical issues at the hotel. Hotel InterContinental is preparing to host players from Florida State University and the University of Georgia for the Orange Bowl game on Dec. 30, and the installation of the Big Orange was thought to be disruptive.

But the city of Miami announced Thursday that the physical version will make a “comeback” as 2023 becomes 2024.

“I am proud to continue to support the installation of this community tradition,” Miami Mayor Francis Suarez said in a statement. “The Big Orange not only has been a part of our New Year's celebration for more than 30 years, but it is an attraction that the thousands of residents and visitors that participate in our NYE Bash look forward to enjoying every year.”

After logistic coordination, the Hotel InterContinental, the Greater Miami Host Committee and the Miami Downtown Development Authority came up with a plan to save the Big Orange's appearance, part of the annual New Year's celebration at nearby Bayfront Park.

Typically, the Big Orange would be installed by Dec. 27 for a test run, but now it could be set up sooner to clear the way for the Orange Bowl-related activities at the hotel.

Cheri Carpenter, wife and business partner of the Big Orange creator, told the Miami Herald that the Big Orange could be set up 10 days before the event, on Dec. 21.

"It's just crazy," she said. "It's been a little minute since we have been out there."

Apart from solving planning issues, Carpenter said public support to bring the Big Orange back to downtown Miami played a big part in the decision.

"We're happy it's back on," she said. "It makes a lot of people happy."