

DATE: March 31, 2009

Preservation of Wilson sells its first House

After sitting vacant and threatened with continued deterioration from the weather and neglect, Wilson's 1902 Darden Douglas House has been sold under the efforts of Preservation of Wilson. This Victorian home with Colonial Revival details is architecturally, culturally and historically significant to the Old Wilson Historic District in Wilson, NC.

Gaynell Stallings, a Wilson business owner and preservationist, has purchased the property. This will make the fifth historic property that Stallings owns in Wilson's five National Register of Historic Districts.

When completed, the house will be converted into a special events facility for weddings, receptions, parties and business socials. It will have a full service commercial kitchen for catering. Stallings proudly says "I have a vision."

This is the first home sold by Preservation of Wilson, a nonprofit organization formed to address ways to advance historic preservation and strengthen the residential market in the historic districts. Working under an aggressive three year neighborhood revitalization effort, Preservation of Wilson's efforts are supported by the City of Wilson and a growing number of volunteers and donors.

Stallings and Preservation of Wilson have entered into a Rehabilitation Agreement which outlines the timeline and scope of work until the project is completed. Within the first three months, Stallings will focus on the immediate needs to stabilize the property from further deterioration. The project will be fully completed by a 36 month deadline.

Preservation of Wilson has been marketing the house since October 2006 seeking a preservation minded owner occupied buyer. Attached to the deed is now a list of important features and elements that contribute to its historic significance. "One hundred years from now this property will be protected and continue to serve as one of Wilson's most architecturally significant properties in the Old Wilson Historic District," says Kathy Bethune, executive director, Preservation of Wilson.

Stallings and Preservation of Wilson will work closely during the three year construction process to ensure that the Rehabilitation Agreement and Protective Covenants are being followed as written. These agreements were drafted in partnership with Stallings offering her a revitalization plan that supports her business plan and are easy to abide by.

Stallings is no stranger to this type of project. She has restored historic homes in Savannah, GA, and Annapolis, MD. The Savannah property was her first project.

She then purchased and restored three more homes in Annapolis, MD, on Market Street, one of the most historic streets in downtown near the Annapolis waterfront. The last property she restored in Annapolis was the last condemned property in the city. HGTV did a segment on the project on their TV show "Old Homes Restored," giving Stallings's work national attention.

Wilson has a large inventory of housing stock that is rich in architecture and design and is known for its bungalows and wonderful architectural details. Wilson's homes are part of the book, "The American Porch" by author Michael Dolan. It lists Wilson among cities such as South Boston and Key West as having the best American porches.

Today many homes have been neglected, abandoned or razed due to dilapidated conditions. Many of the homes that remain suffer from a lack maintenance, have been divided into apartments or boarding houses and the area has been know as a magnet for crime and drug activity.

A grassroots effort was formed in October 2005 when it began to address ways to advance historic preservation and strengthen the residential market surrounding the downtown area. Learning form Preservation North Carolina, and working with the City of Wilson and hundreds of volunteers, Preservation of Wilson is now beginning to see results that will lead to great opportunities for neighborhood revitalization.

Downtown Wilson has a rapidly growing commercial district with a steady increase in private investments dollars. Three new restaurants have opened in the last year, retail businesses are on the rise and owner occupied businesses are leading the way. An attractive business incentives program has effectively encouraged the recruitment of businesses that are pedestrian friendly, tourist related and have a strong business plan.

To learn more contact Kathy Bethune at 252-234-7694.

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