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NEWS » THE FLY-BY

December 09, 2010

It Takes a Village

The historic Goyer-Lee House gets a facelift.
by [CHRIS DAVIS](#)



After half a century of sitting vacant, the city-owned Goyer-Lee House in downtown's Victorian Village is gearing up for a potential new tenant.

On November 23rd, the Memphis City Council moved to allow the sale of the crumbling, Gothic-revival mansion at 680 Adams.

Following that decision, a handful of volunteers from Clean Memphis, Memphis City Beautiful, Lambda Chi Alpha, and Victorian Village, Inc. showed up Sunday afternoon to clean the grand old home's 8,300-square-foot interior.

"This is the original Lee house television," joked Scott Blake, executive director for Victorian Village, Inc., as he and an assistant lugged a huge television through a room lined with antique mirrors and ornate fireplaces.

The sprawling structure was built in 1841 and has served as home to several prominent Memphians, including Charles Goyer, a founder of Union Planters bank, and riverboat tycoon James Lee.

The Goyer-Lee House was deeded to the city in 1929 to house the Memphis Academy of Arts (now known as the Memphis College of Art), but it's been vacant since the art school moved to its Overton

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Park location in 1959.

Blake said the city council took a big step to help revitalize the neighborhood when it resolved to authorize the sale of the property. The council's action allows Mayor A C Wharton to enter into an agreement with the Center City Development Corporation, which will act as a transactional agent for the property.

The property will be sold to a private developer chosen through the request-for-proposals process. The goal is to find a qualified buyer with the means to both obtain and develop the historic property.

"Buying is the easy part," Blake said. "The last thing you want is to sell the property to somebody who can afford the house but can't afford to do anything with it. It can be hard to get the capital to infuse in a place like this."

Federal tax credits for rehabilitating historic properties aren't available until after the job is complete.

Although the house has fallen into disrepair, many interesting flourishes remain. A room on the second floor has become the storage area for salvaged pieces of architectural detail.

"This must have been a ballroom," gasped one volunteer as he topped the stairs and entered the expansive third floor, where peeling paint revealed 50-year-old art-class graffiti.

"You couldn't build this house today," Blake added as he pointed to the remains of an ornate fresco on the dirty plaster ceiling. "This could be a great restaurant if somebody was ambitious and wanted to do that. It would make a fantastic wedding venue."

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By Memphis Flyer

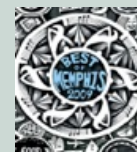
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