

The Guest House/Alexander Inn Senior Living Center

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 5, 2012)

NOTE: The City Council unanimously approved the payment in lieu of taxes proposal on Monday, 10/22/12, allowing this project to proceed. There will be a press release soon and actual stabilization efforts could begin very soon. I serve on the East Tennessee Preservation Alliance board of directors as do Lloyd and Betty Stokes. We are pleased to be a part of this highly desirable initiative to preserve this icon of Oak Ridge history!

This installment of *Historically Speaking* will focus on the project to preserve the Guest House/Alexander Inn as a senior living center. I am pleased to bring you insights into the effort being undertaken by Rick Dover and to share with you my recent interaction with Rick regarding the "***Guest House/Alexander Inn Senior Living Center.***"

"Family Pride Corporation is a family-owned and operated company, dedicated to preserving the heritage of our community and being good stewards through the use of environmentally friendly and sustainable building methods," as stated on their web site <http://familypridecorp.com/>.

Their web site continues, "We design, build, renovate, manage and maintain award-winning residential environments. Our senior living centers provide the very best service to our residents at reasonable, affordable rates."

Rick Dover and I spoke by phone. Unfortunately, I was unable to meet with Rick, Ethiel Garlington of East Tennessee Preservation Alliance and the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association Board of Directors when they met recently. So, desiring information to provide readers of *Historically Speaking* an update on the status of the preservation and restoration of the Guest House/Alexander Inn, I asked Ethiel for Rick's contact information.

Our phone conversation was most enlightening for me. I know Rick by reputation as I have participated in my capacity as a member of the East Tennessee Preservation Alliance board of directors when we have awarded Rick and his company for preservation efforts they have successfully completed in Loudon County. So, I was glad to get to talk to such an ardent historic preservationist. He provided to be just that, even beyond my hopes. I was able to meet Rick in person at the Oak Ridge City Council meeting on Monday, 10/22/12, and was very pleased with his responses to council's questions.

His first comments to me on the phone were, "We want to get it right with the Guest House." He repeated this intent at city council meeting. He went on to say that the structure is in the best shape of any of the other three locations in Loudon County that his company has restored and are now using. You can see these facilities at: <http://www.loudonassistedliving.com/> There are two in Loudon and one in Lenoir City.

Right now Rick is in a "listen and learn" mode of his preservation/restoration efforts. He is seeking any information, photographs of the interior of the hotel, furnishings, colors, etc. IF ANYONE OF YOU has old photographs, brochures, written information or anything else that would help Rick learn the specific details of the Guest House/Alexander Inn, please let me know and I will get you in touch with the right people in his organization.

An example of what he is seeking is to learn the colors of the paint used during the Guest House era. He is seeking to know the color of the exterior as well as the interiors during the Manhattan Project. Any of you who stayed there should write me your recollections of how the place actually looked.

The Guest House/Alexander Inn Senior Living Center

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 5, 2012)

Rick told me their intent is to keep the exact footprint that exists now. This means he will have to tear down the ballroom and kitchen, but will rebuild them both to their original design. He will keep the addition on the back that was built more recently than the Guest House portion.

One of the things Rick is proudest of is a visit he made recently to the main offices of the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owens and Merrill in Chicago. They gave him a great welcome, a tour of the facility and finally showed him the original drawings for Oak Ridge that included the precise drawings for the Guest House! Now how about that? Don't you know Rick was floating on air...

Rick cited **five things** that are on his mind right now regarding this project.

First, the grand funding is dependent upon the delivery to the Department of Energy a project plan that they must approve. This is different from other projects and Rick is obviously willing to do what is required, but it will take time and effort to write the plan in the form DOE desires to see it. He said this would cause an initial delay, but his firm is already working on writing the plan.

Second, he needs to get as much detail about the original design, colors, structure, furnishing, etc. as he can, thus my request above for information from readers. Please respond with what you recall or have available.

Third, his evaluation of the structure by his team has surfaced some portions of the building that are in poor shape, but he says a high percentage of the original structure can be preserved and reused.

Fourth, there are some fairly significant issues that must be addressed, such as the sewer line beneath the building, the sludge in the basement, the road right of way.

Fifth, while Rick intends to do everything practical to include the very best practices for energy conservation into the renovation, some of the things that can be done when a new building is being built may be impossible to do in an existing structure. I am sure we will hear more about this as the project moves forward.

Let me convey to you my personal most positive impressions of Rick Dover, Family Pride Corporation, and what he is attempting to accomplish. With three operating facilities located so close to us, we can easily see what the final results with this project will be. With his inherent love for history and the preservation of old structures, I am convinced we could not have a more dedicated preservationist on the project.

Yet, he is obviously a very good businessman with a very successful company. He is also devoted to doing something for the growing population of seniors. What a great combination and what an excellent fit for Oak Ridge!

Rick and I talked about the Manhattan Project National Historical Park and how the renovated **Guest House/Alexander Inn Senior Living Center** might interface with that heritage tourism feature of the future of our city. I told him I thought the Jackson Square portion of the Oak Ridge historical district would play a substantial role in the park with walking tours, historical signage, and the authentic structures that would blend in well with the senior living center.

The Guest House/Alexander Inn Senior Living Center

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 5, 2012)

He was excited by the possibility of tours coming to the facility and even asked for help to design the historical exhibits that should be placed inside the entrance lobby and outside the building. I assured him that I felt sure the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association would be willing to help there.

One of the key things that make this project work financially is to provide the payment-in-lieu-of-tax (PILOT) that has been requested. This will amount to a savings of approximately \$72,000 per year for 10 years that will be available for use by the developer. At the end of 10 years, the tax payments would become approximately \$80,000 per year. During the 10 years, as a minimum the present taxes to the city and county of approximately \$4,000 each or \$8,000 total) would be collected by the city and county.

This project is important for Oak Ridge in a number of ways. Of course, restoring the Guest House/Alexander Inn is important for Heritage Tourism, but it is even more important that a viable business exist there so the restored structure will remain for the long term.



Maybe one day soon the ***“Guest House/Alexander Inn Senior Living Center”*** can again be an attractive historic element complimentary to the Jackson Square historic “townsite” of Oak Ridge