

The Guest House at the Alexander Inn

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on October 6, 2014)

Rick Dover has the lead role for the restoration and preservation of *The Guest House at the Alexander Inn*. He is also the General Manager of Family Pride Corporation and this is not their first successful restoration and effective utilization of historic structures.

Family Pride began their involvement in senior living when searching for an assisted living facility for Rick Dover's grandfather back in the 1990s. Finding a "combination of affordability, personalized care, and a cozy residential feel was nearly impossible" according to the company's web site when describing why Family Pride Corporation first considered senior living centers as a strategy.

If the type of care they were seeking was difficult to find, they wondered, "How many others had been looking for the same thing and couldn't find it?" That is when they also settled on the idea of using historic icons as the basis for senior living centers.

"We believe that creating affordable and beautiful senior housing is a meaningful way to restore old buildings. It allows us to enter into unique partnerships with municipalities that we would not otherwise be able to enjoy, making truly stunning senior communities affordable for all involved and stabilizing once-neglected neighborhoods." This statement reflects the company's goals and demonstrates why they were interested in *The Guest House at the Alexander Inn*.

At a recent ALTRUSA luncheon meeting, attended by Donna Smith, News Editor for The Oak Ridger and contributor to this column regarding that luncheon. It is here that Rick Dover told the story more personally.

Rick is named for that grandfather for whom the assisted living became a necessity. He said his grandfather was "crotchety" and that when he arranged for people to assist him by mowing the lawn or bringing him food, his grandfather would fire them because he just did not like them.

His grandfather's doctor told Rick that he should find a suitable assisted living facility because his grandfather was not going to be happy with any help Rick provided. So, the search began around Palm Beach, FL. Most locations were upscale and Rick just knew his grandfather would not be at all happy in those surroundings.

That is when Rick happened upon Pat Phillips, who was then the Loudon County planning director. Rick said, "He suggested we look at the old Lenoir City high school building, which was a surplus property for the county that was in poor condition but had enormous potential." This was in 1995.

Thus the River Oaks Senior Living Center, the renovated and restored high school building, became a most successful venture, providing affordable living space for seniors. The venture started the company on the path toward several more historic properties in the Loudon County and Knox County region.

These properties ranged from a hospital to a warehouse and even an historic inn built in 1800 which is now a combination of loft apartments and commercial space. So while senior living is a strong suite, they also develop a broad array of different use facilities.

The Knoxville News Sentinel reported on 9/29/14 that "Family Pride Corp. had recently purchased the Farragut Building." A Family Pride news release indicated plans to renovate the historic structure with likely uses including restaurant, retail and residential space.

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This is a recent venture for Family Pride a firm best known for senior living projects. The News Sentinel went on to cite the former Oakwood Elementary School and the former Knoxville High School building as other senior living projects.

As with many properties Family Pride renovate, this is a new start for the Farragut Building, one that has seen a number of false starts in projects that never actually got off the ground. Rick Dover's reputation of success in such endeavors bode well for this building as well.

At the ALTRUSA luncheon, Rick clearly stated the reason for the unusual name for *The Guest House at the Alexander Inn*. He fondly recalled Bill Wilcox's insistence that the "Guest House" should be in the name, not just the "Alexander Inn."

Rick respected Bill Wilcox's wishes and has included the "Guest House" in the name. He expressed his regret that Bill did not get to live there as he wanted. I recall discussion with Bill where he was adamant that "Guest House" was the proper name. I am pleased that Rick recognized the intensity of Bill's feelings and has honored his wishes.

The Guest House at the Alexander Inn, which Rick Dover affectionately called "A little jewel box of a building," is now scheduled for completion within 100 days. He credits the partnerships, historic tax credits and other incentives with making it possible to reduce the cost to live in this senior living center by roughly 20 percent when compared to other senior living centers.

According to Donna, Rick went on to talk at the ALTRUSA meeting about the details of renovation such as the parts of the building that could not be salvaged, such as the dining room. That will be replaced with what he unabashedly called a "fabulous new dining room." He even invited ALTRUSA to have a lunch meeting there and noted that it will be available for public events on occasion.

There will be a wellness program, a salon, a spa and other amenities that will make living there an exciting experience. And don't forget that amazing front porch where I am sure there will plenty of rocking chairs. The intent is to keep the appearance as close to the original 1940's Guest House as practical. Some doors, paneling and even some of the original wooden flooring will be preserved.

As Rick concluded, he spoke of Oak Ridge's other "terrific assets" such as greenbelts and questioned why anyone would want to commute here to work rather than live here as well. As the meeting closed, Judy Gooch, one of the Altrusans on the Program Committee and who is also a residential designer, told him, "This has given our community such a lift!"

The Guest House at the Alexander Inn was selected by the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association to receive the 2014 Historic Preservation Award. Knowing what is being accomplished there can you even imagine anything else being selected for the preservation award?

To select this award, the ORHPA Historic Properties Committee begins the selection process weeks in advance by reviewing the list of early Oak Ridge properties that might be good candidates for our award. Historic preservation standards such as those established by the National Park Service are considered. The ORPHA committee then pares down a list of candidate properties that are then scheduled to be

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visited along with the owner. The committee then selects one, sometimes two recipients for the annual award.

Beginning in 2002, early Oak Ridge buildings or structures that maintain their historic integrity have annually been presented the Historic Preservation Award near September 19, Oak Ridge's birthday.

ORHPA desires to show thanks to the owners, managers, and staff that protect and preserve these early buildings/structures, and maintain their historic integrity for others to appreciate. A plaque is presented to the owner as a show of appreciation.

Well maintained historic structures will contribute to Oak Ridge's sense of place. They will be supportive elements for the Manhattan Project National Historical Park to be established upon the Senate's passage of the bill that the House has already passed.

The Guest House at the Alexander Inn project has gone the extra mile to meet the Secretary of the Interior's standards as established by the Park Service for rehabilitating a property while maintaining its historic integrity. It will truly be a property that will make Oak Ridgers proud.



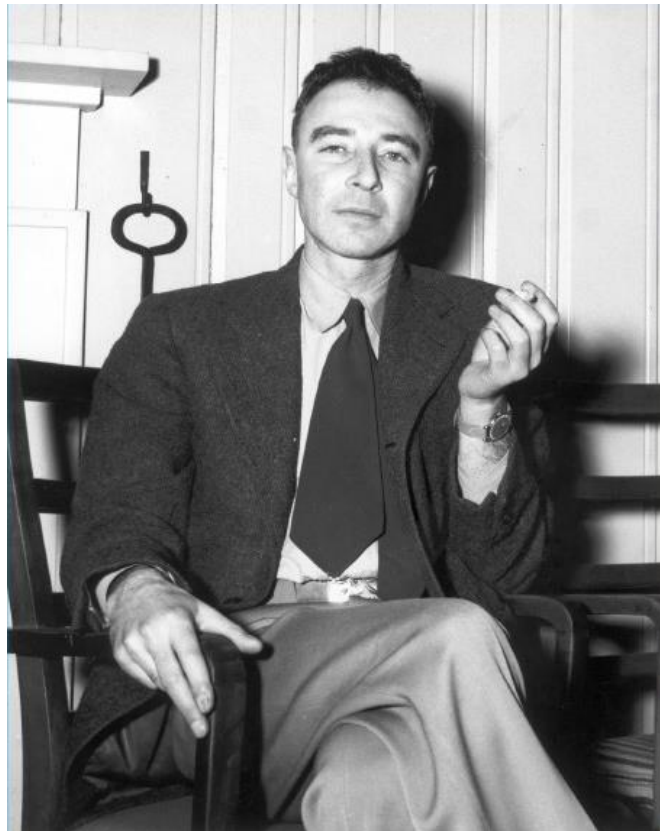
The Guest House at the Alexander Inn is looking better all the time

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Still to be restored and brought back to the way it looked during the Manhattan Project is the main fireplace



Robert Oppenheimer seated next to the mantle of the main fireplace in the front lobby

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Artist conception of The Guest House at the Alexander Inn when restoration is finished