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True Renaissance

Oswego Renaissance Association providing neighborhood makeovers

The residents of Oswego are taking matters into their own hands.

A coalition of 16 neighbors has come together and bought the former Phi Lambda Phi sorority house on 54 W. Fifth St. to reconstruct into a new home.

"What motivated this was that we all recognized how much value a blighted property like that house takes away from the neighborhood," Steven Phillips, resident leader and project coordinator for the Oswego Renaissance Association.

The ORA is a nonprofit organization whose core mission is the revitalization of neighborhoods in the city of Oswego.

The three-floor house was once rented to a couple of sorority members with multiple vacant rooms. It started to go into disrepair with chipped paint on the walls, scuffed floorboards and tainted windows.

**BUSINESS
UPDATE**

The ORA compiled data confirming that the house in its current condition steals \$17,000-\$20,000 away from every other surrounding house.

But once fixed up, all the homes will increase in value, he said.

"It was a real evolution. After several meetings with the others involved, somehow the idea of Steve, my nephew Mark and myself forming an L.L.C. sounded like a good idea," principal investor Connie Ross said.

Ross and Phillips invited neighbors to get involved to support for the project.

Residents in the area loaned the Westside Neighbors L.L.C. funds from as small as \$2,500 up to \$10,000. All told, they raised around \$120,000 and purchased the home from the previous landlord for more than his sale price.

"We didn't twist their arms and really jumped on board. They saw the benefits," Ross said.

Financial clout — Thomas Schneider, president of Pathfinder Bank, had attended a meeting and was willing to finance all reconstruction. "They are assisting in any way possible to make the neighborhood project a reality and a success," Ross noted.

While the goal is to reconstruct what once was a beautiful house, the bigger

picture is attracting more homeowners into the city. Phillips said a majority of the city's workers don't live in Oswego because of the lack of quality housing stock.

"Our neighborhoods are the foundation for a healthy city. If you have neighborhoods like we do in Oswego where the vast majority of the homes are in distressed conditions, it's not going to attract middle-class people who have disposable income, who can spend the money in our local businesses and support our economy," Phillips said.

Ross has lived in Oswego all her life and slowly sees the homes in her neighborhood deteriorating. She describes most of the homes on her street going from being the most beautiful homes to the most damaged.

"We all see the potential of this neighborhood and we just want to make sure it stays strong," Phillips said.

There is a handful of poverty housing in the area that increased last year's property tax, Phillips said. In order to make a change, the city needs to grow financially and the only way to do so is through property and sales taxes, he added.

Ross will be one of the lead designers along with Tom Stultz. The mid-1800's home overlooking the city will be turned into a five bedroom, three full- and one half bath-home, with a two-car garage with modern updates and historic charm.

The parking lot will be removed and constructed into a large double lot.

"Most things we are going to re-finish and keep like the beautiful, deep woodwork, hardwood floors and the medallion on the ceiling. All the character will stay, but we will add in modern fixtures," Ross said.

Although this is their first project, it won't be their last. Ross and Phillips hope to see other residents follow their footsteps and continue to improve property values and quality of life.

For more information on how to get involved, call Ross at 315-342-3686 or email her at connellross@gmail.com.

By Lesley Semel