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City hopes for more rehabs

West end house a beginning

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

NEWPORT - A house in Newport's west end made a turnaround, and the city hopes it's the start of something big.

A year ago, the 130-year-old three-story house at 1006 Central Ave. in the Buena Vista neighborhood was a mess. The city had foreclosed on it. Plywood was nailed where windows once hung, paint was flaking off and the floors were rotted. Over the years, the single-family home had been divided into a warren of five apartments.

"The first time we walked through the building it was so infested with fleas that our legs looked like they had been sprinkled with pepper," said Tim Kiser, a local builder who now owns the property.

ADVERTISEMENT The city turned the property over to Kiser and his wife, Thelma, who were given one year to rehab the house.

"The Kisers have made significant progress on the renovation of the building and all of the work that they have done has been excellent," said Brian Steffen, Newport's director of code enforcement. "The only cost to the city is staff's time checking on the project. The building will be generating tax revenue where it wasn't before."

It wasn't easy for the Kisers. It took longer than they had planned and they ended up spending more than budgeted. The big surprises were the bad floor joists and sheathing. The roof had been leaking for eight to 10 years, Kiser estimated, and rotted all three floors.

"It took 10 30-cubic-yard dumpsters to remove all of the debris," said Kiser.

The Kisers replaced the roof, all the wiring and plumbing. They installed four new bathrooms, and gave the third floor a cathedral ceiling. They tried to stay true to the building's heritage.

They hired local artisan Terry Rasche to rebuild the existing arch-top window.

"We tried to salvage as much baseboard and trim as we could, but due to the deteriorated condition of the house we were unable to salvage any, but we are going to have the existing trim replicated," said Kiser.

Steffen said he hopes this is the first of many such projects.

"The city is looking at programs such as Rehab-a-Rama to revitalize the housing stock in this area. These programs are in the planning stages and should be in place in coming months," said Steffen.

While many believe Newport's West Side hasn't received the attention of the east or the riverfront, Steffen said he doesn't believe this is so.

"I think part of the problem with the perception of the West Side dragging behind is just a perception," he said. "The Buena Vista neighborhood consistently has the most building permits issued and code violation orders of the rest of the neighborhood groups."

He also noted that his department has stepped up enforcement of blighted areas.

Kiser's interest was in just one house. He said his main reward was "in personal satisfaction - to see a building that was to be demolished brought back to its beauty."

