

Preservation-minded firm reverses a trend

By CARMINA BROOKS

A century-old vintage farmhouse in Livonia has fallen into good hands. It was bought last year by two area attorneys with a love for old buildings and is now renovated for office use.

In reverse of a trend to move to suburban high-rises, when lease of the law firm of Klein & Bloom ran out in Southfield's Honeywell Building, they moved their staff into a Livonia country setting this spring.

"We appreciate old buildings, and we wanted our own," senior law partner David Klein said.

The firm held an open house Aug. 1 for clients and guests invited to inspect this example of restoration in its best sense — that of preserving old buildings for adaptive use.

THE 10-ROOM clapboard former residence bought by the firm is a "pure form of Queen Ann style architecture," according to state historians. It is just off I-275 at 39040 W. Seven Mile. Built on a cut stone foundation and

constructed with a type of nail that dates back to "after 1850," passing motorists can easily identify the house by its banistered front porch and second-story cupola.

Shading the porch and buffering the site from a battering of traffic is a huge male mulberry tree. Aged, but strong like the house, the tree has survived with two female mulberry trees in the backyard and lends a home-like character to the property.

Historically known as the Evert House, the site was first registered as historic by the city of Livonia in 1974. This year, through the efforts of new owner Gary Bloom, it was designated an historic site by Michigan's Department of State History Division and nominated for inclusion in the National Registry of Historic Places.

LESLIE J. VOLLERT, historic preservation coordinator for the state in Lansing, said the Evert House is similar to a widely used house plan from a 1900s pattern book. "Artistic Homes," by Herbert C. Civers.

"This does not negate its significance at all, it rather adds to it," Vollert said.

Co-owners of the Evert House and partners-in-law, David Y. Klein and Gary M. Bloom, were instrumental in preservation efforts by Franklin officials in the last decade. Franklin boasts Michigan's first historic district and was accepted in the National Registry of Historic Places in 1969.

Klein is a former Franklin Village President and council member. Bloom is a former president of the Franklin Historical Society and chairman of the Planning Commission and still serves on the latter board.

THE EVERTS were among Livonia's earliest settlers. The property, in their family for 100 years, can be traced back to an 1830 land grant. The family established a vegetable farm and sent their produce to the East Coast via the Barge Canal in New York State.

Bloom said, "The idea was to preserve the structural integrity of the building, restore it where possible to its

original elegance and adapt its use to a professional office."

"The work was performed in close association with Livonia's Historical Preservation Commission, Building Department, Planning Commission and Building Code Board of Review. This requires creativity and sensitivity by all persons involved with such a project to make it successful," Bloom said.

"We received fine cooperation," Betty Lee Francis, also of Franklin, who now heads her own architectural firm, Preservation Planning, Inc., based in Royal Oak, was hired as consultant to the restoration project.

"NO CHANGES were made to the exterior, and extreme care was exercised not only by the architects, but the mechanical engineers and contractors to avoid any damage or changes to architectural characteristics and features of the interior," Bloom said.

Restoration wasn't simple. Where one wall between rooms had been removed, the upstairs sagged, and had to be jacked up to reconstruct the wall.

Very little wall modification was done. Instead, where walls and doors had been removed by previous owners, they were restored in accordance with the original detail of the house.

Carefully restored oak trim, railings and floors and leaded glass windows are notable interior highlights.

Found stored in the barn were original doors removed for an archway connecting what is now Klein's office with a front room. They were restored and replaced in their original position.

KLEIN'S OFFICE features a fireplace. Its old wooden mantel was also found in the barn, but plans to restore it were prevented by a thief. A marble mantel now replaces one of cast stone which the new owner thought was ugly.

In the cellar, stone walls and brick pillars were sand-blasted and featured in what is now an underground level design of rooms by Ms. Francis that includes a library, conference room and kitchen with ample space for utilities and storage.

Bloom's wife, Janice, is given credit for coordinating interior furnishings

for the offices. She worked with the firm's six attorneys so that they could select their own wall and floor coverings and light fixtures.

Traditional 19th century designs from Greenfield Village wallpaper-books were chosen for the foyer, kitchen and bathrooms. Area rugs are used in the offices, and only the basement rooms are carpeted. Mrs. Bloom said.

AT ONE TIME there were seven barns on the property. Foundations are still visible. Architecture of two remaining outbuildings on the 0.6-acre site both have cupolas and have been featured in Eric Stone's book on barns.

The larger outbuilding or main barn is a three-story former carriage house, built from rough cut one-inch-thick walnut lumber. It has a square-molded brick floor and originally belonged with the 1834 house next door.

The small building, about the same age as the carriage house, has been used as a garage, and is now labeled "the cat house" by its present owners because it was once used as a breeding shed for cats.

Principal is hired

By JUDITH BERNE

Joseph Piasecki is only 33, but he has already completed one circle.

And there are those who believe his career is just starting. Piasecki, a West Bloomfield School District administrator, last week was named to head Orchard Lake St. Mary's Preparatory School where he was once a student.

He will assume his duties as superintendent-principal of St. Mary's Sept. 1. On vacation last week, he couldn't be reached for comment.

"I think Orchard Lake Schools is very fortunate to get Joe," West Bloomfield Superintendent Jerry Herman said Friday. "He is a very talented young man who is going to go places. I expect he's going to have a super career."

In announcing the appointment, Chancellor Stanley Milewski said: "St. Mary's is happy to welcome Mr. Piasecki back to Orchard Lake. His accomplishments and dedication to his past educational responsibilities will continue to enhance the commitment of Orchard Lake to excellence. Piasecki, a native of Hamtramck, was a boarding student at St. Mary's for two years. That was in 1959, and he could see West Bloomfield High School (now Abbott Middle School and the school board offices) from his dormitory window where he debated becoming a priest.

"That is a unique school," Piasecki recalled, in an October 1977 interview with The Eclectic. "I wouldn't trade my experiences there for anything. I didn't leave because I hated it, but because I thought there were better things than being a priest the rest of my life."

HE HEADED for public education, graduating from Central Michigan University in 1967 — the first in his family to gain a college degree.

He holds a master's degrees in secondary administration from Central Michigan and a specialist degree in general administration from Wayne State University.

Piasecki is currently working on his doctorate at Michigan State University, which he hopes to complete over the next two years.

Piasecki came to the West Bloomfield School District via Pontiac and the Rochester school districts in September 1977 as one of three assistant principals at West Bloomfield High School.

He took the West Bloomfield position two candidates earlier turned down partly due to labor-management turmoil in the district.

"I figured it was only going to be a temporary kind of thing," Piasecki said at the time. "This is a fine district and I wanted to be part of it."

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