

Inn plan gets OK from neighbors, board
JIM WISE, Staff Writer

The King's Daughters Home has been a landmark on Buchanan Boulevard since 1925, but the King's Daughters have been gone since 2006. This week, the Colonial Revival rest home jumped one hoop on its way to a new career -- as the King's Daughters Inn.

"A win-win situation," said Dan Jewell, who lives on Gloria Avenue -- 70 steps, he said, from the King's Daughters' door. "A friendly little business."

After hearing Jewell and several other Trinity Park residents talk up the conversion this week, the Durham Board of Adjustment gave prospective innkeepers Colin and Deanna Crossman a unanimous go-ahead.

The Crossmans, who own a Ninth Street real-estate firm, want to convert the 17,000-square foot building into a 17-room B&B, with spaces for small meetings, wedding receptions and the like. "We haven't even closed on the property yet," Colin Crossman said Wednesday. "We still have to get building permits and figure out what's in the walls."

There are falling plaster and leaks to fix, heating and plumbing systems to replace. Most optimistically, he said, the inn might open by the end of the year.

"Who knows?" he said. "It made too much sense for us to let go of it."

Durham's Sheltering Home Circle of the King's Daughters -- a local chapter of a nationwide charitable organization -- formed in 1903 and set out to establish a home for elderly women. Trinity Park developer Brodie Duke donated \$500 and two lots at 204 N. Buchanan for the "old ladies home," and in 1911 the Daughters opened for 12 residents. Demand soon outran room, and Brodie Duke's brothers Ben and James B. chipped in \$40,000 for a new, bigger home at the same site that opened in 1925.

In its day, the Home was home to as many as 40 women, but residence declined as other forms of elderly housing came on the market. With only three ladies remaining, and escalating upkeep costs, the King's Daughters closed the home and put it up for sale.

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The Crossmans, who live just off East Campus, saw the "For Sale" sign while they were taking a walk.

"We thought about what we could do with the building," Colin Crossman said. "This would make a great bed-and-breakfast."

They contracted to buy it last spring. At the time, Trinity Park was in a highly charged dispute over a proposed condominium complex just two blocks from the King's Daughters Home. The Crossmans set out to win their prospective neighbors over -- announcing their plan on the neighborhood e-mail list, and keeping in touch personally and electronically as time went along.

It paid off. Not only was there an overflow crowd supporting them at the Board of Adjustment, but even those neighbors raising "concerns" -- over noise, parking and alcohol in an area long blighted by raucous student parties -- made a point to say they favored the basic idea.

"We are excited to have them as neighbors," said Kimberly Isley of Watts Street, one of the most adamant opponents of the now-defunct condominium project. "Colin and Deanna know what the concerns of the neighborhood are and are being very mindful.

"What is most exciting to me is, the historic integrity of the building will be kept and the use that is proposed will have the most minimal impact on the neighborhood."

Jewell, a landscape architect who studied the home for other interested clients, said a bed-and-breakfast is the optimal use for the building as it is, particularly given the modern zoning-code requirements for parking.

"There's not much you can do with the building," Jewell said. "It was built before people had lots of cars as a rule, and the people who used it, elderly ladies, did not use cars very much." Making deals with a neighboring landowner and a nearby funeral home, the Crossmans got the parking to suit the law, without having to knock part of the building down.

The King's Daughters Inn is turning out a family enterprise: Deanna's parents, Denel and Gary Pugh, will be moving up from Charlotte to live in and help run the inn. Colin's parents, Kim and Leslie Crossman, own a manufacturing company in High Point and will be supplying a lot of the furniture.

"The progression of both Deanna and my life has been just see where it takes us," Crossman said, "and the bed-and-breakfast just came up and made sense."

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