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Home sweet home tour

New symposium praises preservation
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Lois Swoboda and David Adlerstein

The 20th annual Historic Apalachicola Home & Garden Tour on May 8 provided a new wine in old bottles, so to speak.

For the first time, the tour added a day-long symposium on Friday for serious preservationists, further underscoring this year's theme, "A Passion for Preservation."

Carrie Kienzle, who directed this year's two-day event, said ticket sales were in the 900 range, with about half of these pre-sales. "That's unheard of, if we usually did 200," she said. "We did another 300 or more on the day of event."

She said that once complimentary tickets are figured in, "we feel confident we did well over 800, and probably close to 900. It was very, very successful."

The two-day event opened with a cocktail party Thursday, May 10, in which Cornerstone Awards, created by the Apalachicola Area Historical Society, were presented to Lynn Wilson Spohrer, and Cathy and Lee Willis, for their work with preservation.

In addition, the newly-created Passion for Preservation award was given to the city of Apalachicola for its completion of the restoration of the Holy Family School.

"Our intention is to award the best new commercial or public project for that year, completed in that calendar year, from May to May," said Kienzle.

She said a committee made up of representatives from Trinity Episcopal Church, the Apalachicola Bay Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Apalachicola, the historical society and their city made the choice after reviewing five applicants.

In addition, James G. Cusick; curator for special collections at the George A. Smathers Library at the University of Florida, presented Mayor Van Johnson with a framed replica of the 1834 city map, that the city has entrusted to the university for safekeeping.

Friday with breakfast at Trinity's vicarage, followed by a lecture by architect Willoughby Marshall, a patriarch of local preservation efforts and author of "Apalachicola: Economic Development through Historic Preservation.

He detailed his efforts to preserve the historic integrity of the Apalachicola Museum of Art, formerly the Fry-Center House. Against a backdrop of Neil Smith-Willow paintings celebrating local culture, he also spoke to the strides the community, in general, made in the last quarter of the 20th-century and dawn of the 21st.

Symposium goes, in a flotilla of golf carts, then made their way to the Holy Family School in Franklin Square, recently reborn as Holy Family Senior Center, where three eminent scholars discussed historic renovation and government review. Anita Grove, director of the Apalachicola Area Bay Chamber of Commerce, moderated the forum.

Beth LaCivita, of Historic Florida Consulting LLC, gave the first presentation. A former executive director of Tallahassee's local historic preservation board, who graduated with a master's in history with honors from Florida



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The Shell Cottage has a display by owners Tracy and Mike Jones.

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State University in 1986, she has over 20 years of professional experience in historical administration and education, and historic preservation.

She told listeners there is much misinformation about historic preservation, and that to preserve the integrity of historic structures, one must know the history of the community and identify key local architectural components. "Find the keepers of the documents," she advised.

LaCivita also supported government guidance for preservation. "An architectural review board is an important consultant for city government today," she said.

She advised historic communities to seek admission to the Certified Local Government (CLG) program; a preservation partnership between local, state and national governments focused on promoting historic preservation at the grass roots level. The program is jointly administered by the National Park Service and the State Historic Preservation Offices.

There is a special pot of federal money available to CLG members, LaCivita said, adding that Apalachicola is a prime candidate for the honor. "The state loves this town," she said.

LaCivita was followed to the podium by architect Warren Emo, principal of award winning EMO/Architects, Inc., who professed a 20-year love affair with Apalachicola.

He advised preservationist to "start with the town plan" when planning a restoration project. He too spoke in support of government review and guidelines for restoration.

"Guidelines scare people to death because it seems like too much government but you need some kind of a foundation," he said.

He proceeded to outline the numerous styles of architecture featured in Apalachicola's neighborhoods, ranging from the humble shotgun shack to imposing Second Empire to elegant Queen Ann. He paid special tribute to the Gulf coast cottage, designed to withstand the rigors of heat and wind imposed by the coastal environment.

The final presentation came from Charles Olson, a registered Georgia and Florida architect whose private firm, Olson Architects, Inc. specializes in hunting plantations, residential architecture, historic preservation and small commercial projects. He is a current board member and past president of Thomasville Landmarks, Inc. and past chair of the Thomasville, Historic Preservation Commission.

He said he grew up spending summers in St. Teresa and admiring the historic architecture of Apalachicola. "I worked with Willoughby in the 1980s," he said. "Who would have known 20 years later the progress you would have made?"

He warned of the dangers of backsliding in preservation programs and he too is a fan of government mandated design guidelines. "Apalachicola is the real thing but there's no guarantee it won't go away." He said.

"Design guidelines are scary," he agreed. "But it's been established nationwide that design guidelines protect property values, increase property values and stabilize an area."

He pointed out that historic guidelines are often less restrictive than the guidelines in newer developments, and talked about the sort of documentation useful to the restorer, including insurance maps that trace the metamorphosis of a building over time.

He said one common misconception about restoration is that a structure must be restored to its original form. He used as an example a home built circa 1880 but restored to its 1920 form.

Following a lively question and answer session, the gulf cart fleet moved on to lunch at the Owl Café and a lecture by Debbie Beard on cracker houses. The afternoon was topped off by a tour of historic Orman House, for the three dozen participants.

On Saturday, the Bickel home at 96 6th Street was featured on the tour, which also included the Tartt Home (25 5th Avenue); Marks / Clark Home (65 Avenue E); Martin House (29 5th Avenue); Seaton - Schley Home (50 5th Street); Monod Home (79 Avenue G); Smith-McCoy Home (76 Avenue G); Jones Home (121 Avenue B); and Emo Home (67 Avenue C).

Along with the Trinity Church Memorial Garden, featured were the Williar Garden (31 9th Street); Suarez Garden (59 Avenue G); and the Vogt Garden (87 Avenue D).

"No one was disappointed in the featured home, it delivered what we advertised," said Kienzle. "We also expected people to really find Ouida Tartt's house charming and vernacular, the way she incorporated the old house with a new structure."

She said all the homes drew praise, but the sleeper on the tour, which many people said they liked was the Shell Cottage, the former Floyd home, which had undergone a lot of renovation. "Mike and Tracy Jones have a lumber plantation in family and the wood in house drew them into it," said Kienzle. "The whole interior is first generation wood">



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Kienzle said people on the tour were impressed with the Williar garden, mainly because of his vast array of tools. "His shed is very large and he had it opened and every tool arranged by size and type and hanging from the wall. It is a thing of beauty," she said.

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