

Local homes open doors for holidays

BY SHANNON WALTER
Staff Reporter

Contrasting historical with brand new, two homes showcased their holiday decoration and design Sunday afternoon at the Holiday Home Tour, sponsored by the Kirksville Thousand Hill Rotary Club.

The historic Captain Thomas Harris home that was featured in the Oct. 1 issue of the Index was one of the homes showcased Sunday. A long line stretched out of the house, filled with curious Kirksville residents who had been waiting to see the house since Daryl Shafer purchased it in 2006. He finished renovations and was able to move in about two years ago. Since then, he said he has worked to perfect everything.

"People have been curious about what I've been doing," Shafer said. "That's why there was a line of people. I think the comments were really favorable though. And amazingly people thought a lot more was original, but I've tried to decorate it to recreate the original look."

The home was thoroughly decorated for Christmas. Shafer said he and his mother spent about 60 hours decorating the house to present it to the public.

"We tried to keep the look of the decorations in the front parlor fairly authentic to what I consider 19th century," Shafer said. "The family room showcased more family decorations that are precious to my mother."

Due to the layout of Shafer's home, he said he was unable to allow people to view each room. The front parlor used for formal dining was shown, featuring a bay window, the only thing that deviates from the square design of the home. The family room and a portion of the kitchen also were shown. After walking through the house, visitors were encouraged to walk around the side to see the staircase leading from the kitchen that was traditionally used by maids.

Visitors were shuffled straight through the middle of the house and allowed to exit straight through the back. Shafer said he heard a few complaints from people about not seeing the entire home, but overall people seemed to

Historical Places

be pleased.

"I was stressed about moving people through and knowing that they got a good view of the house," he said. "I couldn't just let them wander through because we couldn't have managed that number of people."

Michael and Kay Rockot also showcased their home on the tour. Michael Rockot designed and built the home with his construction company, Rockot and Taylor Development, in 2007.

Rockot said he was excited to show his home because, as a builder, he likes to show others his work. The layout of his home is very open, and he said it would fit many different families and people. This is something he said he wanted the public to see.

"I try to design houses for the way I would live in it," he said. "This house is designed with not many hallways, it's very open. Everything is designed to be open so that it looks bigger, yet it's cozy in each area."

Rockot said that he builds quite a few custom homes and advises people to think about building a house that's functional for them not only at the time of building, but also for the future.

"I try to explain to people that they should look ahead rather than buying what they like right now, so that they can build a home that can be grown into," he said.

Rotarian Terri Jones arranged the entire event and greeted people at the door of the Rockots' home. She said the home tour has been held for approximately the last 10 years.

In the past, the Rotary Club sold about 600 tickets, but the numbers have not been tallied this year, she said. Tickets were \$5 in advance and \$6 at the door. The money is benefitting the Adair County Library Endowment Fund.

"We support lots of local and national charities, such as scholarships for schools in the area, the YMCA, the Salvation Army and the Rotary Foundation," Jones said. "Fund-raisers such as this one are really important for us to raise funds for these organizations."

The Kirksville Thousand Hills Rotary Club has 45 members. They host the home tour every year.



Shannon Walter/Index

Local resident Daryl Shafer opened the historic Captain Thomas Harris home to welcome in the community for the annual Holiday Home Tour.

Family survives as minimalists

BY MICHELLE MARTIN
Staff Reporter

The Hughes family lives by candlelight at night because their 80-acre homestead is electricity and petroleum free. They and the other inhabitants of the Possibility Alliance use an outdoor house, grow their own food and choose to live well under the poverty line at less than \$3,000 a year.

Yet founder Ethan Hughes said he feels that they live like kings and queens.

The Possibility Alliance is a center on the outskirts of La Plata where Hughes, his wife Sarah and their daughter live. The vast, grassy landscape surrounding the Hughes' home radiates an aura of peace. No white noise permeates the air — just the sounds of wind and bustling livestock. The only structures are the Hughes' house, a barn and a few homemade clay formations, like an outdoor kitchen.

Why does this family forego the most salient aspects of the modern lifestyle? Hughes' answer is simple: To live so all people and life can thrive.

"Every decision we make [is a question of], 'how is it going to affect the ducks over there, pond?' 'How is it going to affect our water?' 'How's it going to affect someone in a war zone?' 'How is it going to affect someone in a sweatshop?'" Hughes said.

Before founding the Possibility Alliance two and a half years ago, Ethan and Sarah Hughes lived in a peace community called the Ark in France started by one of Gandhi's followers. The community grew its own food, gave it to the poor, worked for peace and hosted people around the world for free.

"That project really informed us of what was possible," Ethan Hughes said.

The Hughes became inspired to start a similar project in the United States. A week after sending out a prayer for a site, a friend found a perfect location in La Plata. After purchasing the land via donations without even seeing it first, the Hughes took a boat to Florida and rode their bikes to La Plata.

Various residents and interns usually reside on the property, and visitors are frequent — this

year the Alliance hosted 1,400 people, including Truman students and visitors from Israel and Romania. Some are intrigued by the Alliance's policy of "radical simplicity," and others admire their service-oriented lifestyle. From Christian youth groups to atheist activists, no one is ever turned away.

"Everyone is sacred," Hughes said. "If we turn one person away, we turn the whole world away."

The center strives to embody the principle of "radical simplicity," which entails remaining free from electricity and petroleum, leaving the Possibility Alliance with one of the lowest carbon footprints in the country. Thus, they have no modern conveniences, such as computers, cell phones or stereos.

Hughes said that although he misses a few luxuries, like sci-fi movies, he wouldn't trade his lifestyle for anything.

"I know that if [the roof] fell on me right now, I would be content," he said. "I feel like I'm living my life to the fullest, and I go to bed feeling very content. I see that what a lot of people are lacking is not food, shelter or clothing. I have friends who have their Ph.D's, and they're not content. I think content means living everything that's in our heart, no matter what the risk."

Service and activism are other important guiding principles of the Possibility Alliance. The Alliance is the headquarters for the Superheroes, a network of 500 people who bike around the country wearing superhero costumes, offering a helping hand to whomever they find. Service for the Alliance entails biking around to distribute turkeys to the poor on Thanksgiving or helping a neighbor build up his house after it burns down.

Activism enables the Alliance to support the causes it believes in, such as Truman's bike co-op, standing up for local farmers' rights and giving support and guidance to Truman's community garden. The Alliance bought 100 bikes for Truman's bike co-op and trained the mechanics when it started.

Inner work and gratitude comprise the rest of the guiding principles. These involve becoming more loving and humble and refraining from placing judgment on the world. Love is such a guiding principle that it simply cannot coexist with judgment, Hughes said. Instead, the Alliance simply attempts to live according to its vision.

"When someone shows up here, we don't tell them what to do," he said. "We say, 'What's in your heart?'"

The Alliance runs on a gift economy, which means they don't charge for any services or items they offer to others, including internships or programs such as Permaculture certification. The center runs entirely from donations. Because of their simple lifestyle, Hughes said they have moved hundreds of thousands of dollars toward outside programs and people who need support.

"So much of mainstream society says, 'What's going to be your job when you graduate? How are you going to feed yourself?'" Hughes said. "Instead, I want to help people and love people and trust that I'll be taken care of."

Steven De La Rosa currently is living at the Possibility Alliance for a month to properly learn how they live. He hopes to start a similar center elsewhere with his partner.

In addition to the various skills he will learn, like how to raise chickens or skin a deer, he said he simply hopes to learn how to function in an alternative lifestyle.

"A lot is just coming from their energy and volition," he said. "This is the place I've seen this done to the greatest extent — no electricity, not having much impact. We're seeing that it's doable."

Senior Will Erker frequently visits the Possibility Alliance and hopes to land an internship there during the summer. When he mentioned that he wanted to raise some chickens last summer, he was caught off guard when they offered

him chickens for free.

"They said I could have some, and I said, 'Yeah, I'd love to buy them from you,'" Erker said. "I didn't realize at that time that that's how they operated, and I had to realize that they actually wanted to give me these chickens. No return expected."

Erker said he recalled an incident in which someone asked Ethan Hughes for his bike to test his generosity. Ethan gave it away, and soon the person brought the bike back simply because he was so impressed by Hughes' kindness.

The Alliance has offered assistance in the form of donations, guidance and volunteer work to a few projects with which Erker was involved, including the Ray Miller garden and Truman's upcoming community garden.

The Possibility Alliance has impressed Erker because, more than anyone else he knows, they live what they believe, he said.

"It's not about doctrine or dogma," he said. "It's about having a couple of core values that you actually take seriously. I just don't know that many people who are so serious about it. That's why they're so inspiring. People are generous to them because they go there and they see that they're not wasting money on frivolous expenses."

If Erker obtains an internship at the Possibility Alliance, he hopes to participate in their daily activities, which will help him learn what he can do to reduce his own impact. He said an internship would empower him to learn practical skills, such as how to raise a flock of chickens without imported feeds, feed a family on a tiny plot of ground and milk goats. In addition, he said the Alliance has taught him what people are capable of.

Erker said he encourages everyone to visit the Possibility Alliance to see the truth for themselves.

"If you need a break from reality, you should call the people at the Possibility Alliance and say, 'I'm really stressed out with reality. I need to come spend the night on your land for a couple of nights to calm down a little,'" he said. "You should do it."

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Will Erker
Senior



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