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ACCENT



Bulletin Photo by Holly Kozelsky

The congregation of Christ Episcopal Church renovated its former rectory, which now is used as a rectory again for Rector Nick Hull (from left) and his wife, Leandra Burke. Members of the congregation involved in the project include Cari Zimmer, Carol Deaton and Debbie Lewis.

Community, congregation work together on restoration project

By **HOLLY KOZELSKY**

MARTINSVILLE — A historic house that once was facing being torn down now has a second lease on life.

It's the rectory of Christ Episcopal Church, at 325 E. Church St., on the other side of the church from the church's Parish House.

The church's new rector, Nicolas "Nick" Hull, and his wife, Leandra Burke, say that the house is not what drew them to Martinsville, but it was definitely the icing on the cake.

To destroy or save

Built in the 1940s, the house is part of federal, state and local historic registers as a noted example of Colonial Revival architecture. It is known as the Charles C. Fishburne House, named for a former rector of the church.

"The house has an interesting history," Hull said. The porch on the side nearest the church once was the rector's office, he said, and a public area for parishioners and visitors.

Among the house's noted characteristics are a cornice line of simple, molded wood; double-hung sash windows with shutters; a porch with paired square columns, a pediment and



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Christ Episcopal Church wanted to tear down its former rectory in 2013, but the city's Architectural Review Board wouldn't allow that, because of the house's historical significance. Instead, the church renovated it, including completely redoing the kitchen. Now the church's rector, Nick Hull, and his wife, Leandra Burke, live there.

square-post balustrade; and a single-story addition with a shed roof. Keystone lintel is atop first-floor windows, which have wood panel aprons below them.

It has four bedrooms and two and a half bathrooms.

It was used as a rectory until the early 1980s, when Ed Covert came as rector, Debbie Lewis

said. Covert wanted to build equity in his own home, Sue Rosser said.

The church then rented out the rectory. Most recently it was used for professional services by counselor Julia Hall. Hall moved her business to Cleveland Avenue when the church decided to do something different with the

property, about two years ago. The money the church received in rent basically offset the rector's housing allowance, Rosser said.

Through the years, the house's condition deteriorated, and the church voted to tear it down in 2013. However, since it was on historic registries, the church had to get permission first.

The church put the request through the Martinsville Architectural Review Board, which in September 2014 denied permission to demolish the house.

"The ARB denied the request because demolition due to neglect is unacceptable, and that's what it was. We had neglected it over the years," Rosser said.

During the time the church was vying to get the house demolished, the city received 13 calls, letters and emails from the public about the proposal, according to Bulletin reports. All but one was in opposition to the demolition, and eight of those voicing opposition were Christ Episcopal members.

'Resurrection of the rectory'

"We like to call it a resurrection of the rectory," Rosser said.

"Sue Rosser was the driving

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force in getting the rectory restored," Carol Deaton said. Deaton is now the church's junior warden, the person in charge of care of the building and grounds.

Trent Bowles, the junior warden at the time of the renovation, used his "expertise for construction" in getting it done, Lewis said. Zach Foster was the crew leader.

Rosser said that to finance the renovations, the church had a variety of fundraisers, including a rummage sale. It also received donations from the congregation and used "some funds in different places that were kind of dormant. We just dug deep."

The church "ran into more than we thought" with the scope of the renovations, Lewis said. The work was mostly cosmetic, she said, with some repairs due to areas affected by water damage and electric. The floors were refinished, and the kitchen was redesigned.

The house was completely rewired to code, Rosser said, and a new heating and air conditioning system was installed.

"Anybody who's done any restoration of a home knows that whatever you plan for it to be, it goes way beyond that," Rosser said. She declined to say how much the renovations cost.

To get the cosmetic work done, "people from the church adopted rooms," Cari Zimmer said.

"We created teams and had a lot of people involved," Lewis said.

Rosser said that in general, rectors used to live in rectories near the church, and in recent decades they started preferring to buy their own houses instead. Now, though, she is seeing the trend reverse itself: Rectors are preferring to live in rectories, in part to be near the church, and also to avoid the potential hassle of having to sell a house when they



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Renovations of Christ Episcopal Church's rectory at 325 E. Church St. have been completed, and Rector Nick Hull and his wife, Leandra Burke, have lived there for a year so far. They are on the front porch with church members involved with the improvements: (from left) Cari Zimmer, Burke, Hull, Debbie Lewis and Carol Deaton.

move to new churches.

The renovation of Christ Episcopal rectory, she added, "could not have turned out better. Now it's just a jewel. It's an absolute jewel. It's a loving home."

The rector and his wife Hull grew up in Michigan and Georgia. He was raised Catholic, he said, and had his first exposure to the Episcopal church when he was a teenager.

He attended Sewanee: The University of the South in Tennessee, the only Episcopal college, he said, and there met Burke.

Various outreach projects he did as a college student were meaningful to him, he said. He helped with a halfway house for people overcoming drug addictions and also with Habitat for Humanity.

His major was religious studies, and he went through the standard two-year discernment process. That's an Episcopal program required for people before they enter seminary.

The point is to help the students determine the

right field for them, be it ministry or something else. Thirty-five began the program, he said, but only six of them went on to seminary.

He went to the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, from which he was graduated in 2014. His first professional position was as a curate – sort of a junior priest paired with a mentor – in Columbus, Georgia. He and Burke married during that time.

Meanwhile, the couple were looking to make their life halfway between both sets of parents, his in Dayton, Georgia, and hers in Northern Virginia. Though it was Hull looking for a job, "I made a point that Leandra was part of every step of the process," he said, and the couple would decide together where to live.

He interviewed for the position at Christ Episcopal by Skype, then visited.

The couple knew immediately that Martinsville was the town for them, they said. "I fell in love with everybody," Burke said.

He started as rector on Oct. 10 – the day before

the couple's first wedding anniversary. "We loved this church" during the interview process, he said, "but were just completely taken aback by the welcome we got" once they moved to Martinsville. "We enjoy the community too."

Moving into the house was a big step for the couple, Hull said.

"We came for the community, and the house was a nice bonus. We were really intimidated – this was a tremendous step up for us," he said.

Their apartment in Columbus was the size of the rectory's living and dining room, he said, and they didn't have furniture to fill the rectory.

The couple laughed when they recalled a visit from a relative. "When is your furniture getting here?" Hull said the uncle asked. "It is here," the couple told him.

Once the new rector and his wife moved in, several members of the congregation also gave them furniture for the house, women from the church said.

The couple “love the outdoors,” Hull said, and are “on the water as much as possible.” They love the natural features of the Henry County area, they said, and often take their dogs out on the river.

Burke is pursuing a master’s degree in library information from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and she is a student teacher at the library of Patrick Henry Elementary School, with Amy Nester. She is slated for May graduation.

“I’m really happy to be here,” she said. She did not grow up going to church, she added, and appreciates the support and friendships being part of a church provides.

“It’s fun hopping over for church and Loaves and Fishes (the church’s community meal), and the kids are so sweet,” she said.

They laugh about the ways they’ve had to get accustomed to small town life.

The second time they took a walk through town, he said, a car’s horn beeped at them. Being from a big city, he initially took offense, thinking the beep was confrontational – until he realized it was to call attention to the fact that the driver was waving a greeting. Now, the couple said laughing, they measure their walks by how many friendly beeps and waves they get, the more the better.

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