

The Alexander Guest House is recognized by President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on July 18, 2016)

Sue Cange, Manager of the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management and Kim Trent, President of Knox Heritage, accepted the Chairman's Award for Achievement in Historic Preservation of the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in Washington, DC, on Wednesday, July 13, 2016.

Rick Dover was not able to attend the award presentation, but is also a recipient of the award. This prestigious award recognizes the Department of Energy's grant of \$500,000 that purchased and stabilized the deteriorated Alexander Inn and Rick Dover's \$8,000,000 investment in our community to create the Alexander Guest House as well as the East Tennessee Preservation Alliance's facilitation of the stabilization and engagement of the Dover Development Corporation.

We are so thankful to see the wonderful Alexander Guest House shining beautifully on the hill near historic Jackson Square and the nearby majestic Chapel on the Hill. What a tremendous difference this handsome historic development in our historic community has made. It is a huge source of pride! It is formally included in the legislation creating the Manhattan Project National Historical Park! Wow! Now that is something...

I recently took Lindsay Crockett, Historic Preservation/Housing Planner of the East Tennessee Development District on a tour of Oak Ridge. Our primary goal was the African Burial Ground for which she is assisting us develop a nomination for recognition on the National Register of Historic Places. However, she also wanted to learn more about Oak Ridge history.

My first thought was to show her the magnificent Alexander Guest House main lobby with its historical photos of Robert Oppenheimer seated near the mantel (retained in its original location with a nice new coat of paint) and Mckee Alexander's photo, both made by Ed Westcott. She was amazed at the rich history on display there. One of the seniors living there was anxious to show us around and tell us how great it was to live there. What an amazing place to live!

I have been privileged to get to know Rick Dover over the past few years and have, on a number of occasions, been invited to view the renovations progress. He even allowed the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association's members to hold the first event there when the main lobby was barely accessible. It was great to see what had already been done to restore the integrity of the structure. Of course, the final finishing touches would be months away, yet already, one could see the tangible evidence of the pride that Rick had in the restoration.

He actually went to the main offices of Skidmore, Owens and Merrill, in Chicago, to review the actual floor plans for the Guest House to be sure he "got it right" when he decided exactly what to do to finish the exterior as authentic as possible. Of course, the interior is really well done with the most modern fixtures and finishes while still retaining the historic atmosphere and much of the original design still quite apparent in the public areas. The suites are, of course, completed in the most comfortable and modern manner.

The Department of Energy became involved in the Alexander Inn Guest House Rehabilitation Project in November, 2011. Because of the legal option that one historically significant structure could be substituted for another when the ability to preserve the intended structure was not feasible, the historic inn that had served to house scientists and newcomers to the Clinton Engineer Works, but was in a sad state of deterioration, was able to be stabilized and ultimately preserved for the benefit of future generations using this creative approach to historic preservation.

When the internationally significant and historic K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Building of 44 acres under one roof could not be saved for future generations because it had been shut down in 1964 and time and weather had taken its toll over the years. Several attempts were made to preserve at least a portion of the historic structure, but ultimately it had to be demolished.

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As a result of the inability to preserve the actual historic structure, the department began to look for alternate methods to preserve the history of Oak Ridge. While preparing for a K-25 History Center, an equipment building to contain replica gaseous diffusion equipment, a viewing tower and marking the footprint of the original K-25 building, the deteriorated condition of the original Guest House caused the city of Oak Ridge to face the potential that the building might have to be condemned and demolished.

Thankfully the provision of a grant of \$500,000 included in the Memorandum of Agreement between the DOE and several stakeholders signed in 2012 allowed the East Tennessee Preservation Alliance to purchase and stabilize the inn until it could be transferred to the Dover Development Corporation.

Rick Dover is well known in East Tennessee for the many historic buildings he has saved and converted to Senior Living Centers and he continues to revive and restore a number of historic buildings across the region. The pride he and his family take in this worthy endeavor is special and literally a Godsend to historic preservation in this area.

Rick is quoted in a Knox Heritage (parent organization for the East Tennessee Preservation Alliance) News Release as saying, "Knox Heritage has been a key partner in our work. They've helped lead the charge to save old buildings by finding innovative ways to work with financial institutions and use historic tax credits to make East Tennessee increasingly a place where old buildings are not abandoned, but rather saved...and our history preserved and embraced. We're thrilled to be a part of it." That's Rick Dover! His heart is in the work of saving historic structures!

Kim Trent, President of Knox Heritage, who also accepted the award for Rick Dover in his absence, said, "The first time Rick set foot in the Alexander Inn he literally fell through the floor. Fortunately he's the kind of guy who can see the potential, not just the current reality!" She also said, "It's wonderful for an East Tennessee project to receive this prestigious national award. There's lots more buildings to be saved, but this project helps prove that it can be done and make economic sense for everybody." This is the highest award in which Knox Heritage has had any involvement.

Sue Cange, Manager of the DOE Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management, said, "We are very pleased that our grant was able to fund efforts to stabilize this historic gem and help make its renovation a viable option for developers. Now, Oak Ridge is able to reclaim a landmark that dates back to its origin." And what a landmark the Alexander Guest House has become. Not only does the historic old inn retain the historic appearance on the exterior, it is filled with Ed Westcott photographs framed and mounted in the main lobby and along the walls of the mail hallways.

The lobby also contains a modern art style montage of Ed's photographs that visually help to tell the history of Oak Ridge. Visitors are welcome to drop by the lobby and explore the historic elements of the restoration and revitalization of this truly historic Oak Ridge landmark.

Milford Wayne Donaldson, Chairman of the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation said in the award invitation letter, "Congratulations to the U. S. Department of Energy for outstanding efforts to preserve America's heritage in keeping with the goals and spirit of the National historic Preservation Act."

I would add congratulations to Sue and the DOE OREM folks for their steadfast efforts to preserve the history of the K-25 site regardless of the hurdles placed in the way of standard preservation of physical facilities. The K-25 Virtual Museum, <http://k-25virtualmuseum.org/>, is another excellent example of alternate methods to preserve the history when conventional means are not available. The equipment building intended to house replica gaseous diffusion equipment is another. And the manner in which attempts are being made to preserve portions of the slab and footprint of the huge K-25 Building is certainly worthy of note.

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These broad initiatives undertaken by DOE OREM to commemorate the history of the K-25 complex and the city of Oak Ridge's larger role in the Manhattan Project to include the preservation of the Guest House stands out as certainly the type of initiative in which the city, state and nation can take pride and know that future generations will better understand what happened here that forever changed the world.

The President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Chairman's Award for Achievement in Historic Preservation ceremony held in the beautiful National Building Museum in Washington, DC, is a milestone of recognition for innovative solutions to difficult historic preservation issues. It could well serve to encourage other such actions to be seen as potential opportunities to achieve effective results when faced with necessary options to taking standard historic preservation actions.

East Tennessee benefits from Knox Heritage's regional efforts working with local historical societies such as the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association and others to seek the most effective means to accomplish historic preservation and produce economic benefits from Heritage Tourism. This award recognizes the DOE's efforts to support Heritage Tourism and I feel sure even more recognition will be forthcoming as the finishing touches are placed on the K-25 History Center, replica equipment building, viewing tower and K-25 Building footprint.

All this bodes well for the Manhattan Project National Historical Park implementation. Remember, the Alexander Guest House is specifically called out in the legislation that created the national park as being an integral part of the facilities that make up the historical park! I am proud to take tours there!

The partnership between Rick Dover and Oak Ridge is an excellent one that proves the value of teamwork and demonstrates the benefits of success joint efforts! Remember, Rick Dover is the first developer in Tennessee to receive this prestigious award! We can be proud of him and that he has made it possible to preserve the iconic historic Guest House for future generations.



Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Chairman Milford Wayne Donaldson is shown with Knox Heritage Executive Director Kim Trent, DOE Oak Ridge Environmental Management Manager Sue Cange and ACHP Expert Member Robert Stanton (photo provided by DOE)

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A large crowd gathered along with Rick Dover to celebrate the start of renewal of the historic icon, the Guest House (photo provided by DOE)



This group photo includes: Author of Racing for the Bomb, Robert S. "Stan" Norris; DOE Historic Preservation Officer, Eric Pryor; Chairman, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Milford Wayne Donaldson, DOE Oak Ridge Environmental Management Manager, Sue Cange; Past ACHP Chairman, John Fowler; Knox Heritage President, Kim Trent; ACHP Expert Member, Robert Stanton; and DOE Deputy Under Secretary for Management and Performance, David M. Klaus (photo provided by DOE)