

Dayton Daily News

Pieces of Dayton's past rescued for future

By [Joanne Huist Smith](#), Staff Writer

Updated 1:29 PM Friday, January 15, 2010



Figure 1 STAFF PHOTO BY JAN UNDERWOOD Workers prepare to take a staircase out of a house at 38 S. Horton St. in Dayton.

DAYTON — Doors and window frames fashioned from hardwoods that grew in the 1800s, antique bathtubs and doorknobs: Browsing materials for sale at the St. Vincent de Paul Construction Depot is like taking a walk back in time.

“We’re really trying to bring the past into the future,” said Doug Thompson, economic development director for Dayton Works Plus. “It takes a lot of work, a lot of love, a lot of passion.”

Dayton Works Plus, including partners St. Vincent de Paul, East End Community Services, PowerNet of Dayton and the Architectural Reclamation Company ARC, began dismantling nuisance homes in October and now have a warehouse of historic treasures for sale.

Unique mantles, siding, even full staircases plus lots of lumber, reclaimed from an era before chemically treated wood, are on sale at the Deconstruction Depot, 945 S. Edwin C. Moses Blvd. Samples of reclaimed materials will be on display at the Miami Valley Home Improvement Show that opens, Jan. 14, at Hara Arena, 1001 Shiloh Springs Road in Trotwood.

The project's goal was twofold — to create jobs and give a second life to building materials that otherwise would end up in a landfill.

The nonprofit organization with about 18 employees has taken down 11 houses and has a contract with the city of Dayton for 28 more using Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds.

"It's a brand-new business, an opportunity to create jobs here in Dayton," Jan Lepore-Jentleson, executive director of East End Community Services, said. "Our goal is to create as many jobs as we can."

Lepore-Jentleson also envisions spinoff businesses.

"I'd love to see an Adirondack chair business in Dayton," she said. "These reclaimed materials can be used to build picnic tables, sheds. It's a matter of one's imagination and skill level."

For now, St. Vincent de Paul, East End Community Services, PowerNet of Dayton and the Architectural Reclamation Company ARC are refining the enterprise, trying to make it sustainable.

It took a crew of about six workers seven and a half days to dismantle the first house down to the foundation. That record has been bumped down to just under six. The goal is five days.

"We've learned a tremendous amount," Doug Thompson, economic development director for Dayton Works Plus, said "We're a business. We've got to find ways to keep it going."

The reclaimed materials, stripped from houses built between 1890 and 1920, are sold at the St. Vincent de Paul Deconstruction Depot, 945 S. Edwin C. Moses Blvd. Items are priced about 50 percent less than new materials, or according to demand.

"There really isn't a price index for these things," Thompson said. "We've found wood so dense, so beautiful, once you clean it up. On the very first house we uncovered redwood siding that had been there for 100 years."

James Kent of Kent Development Group and a member of ARC, said about 85 percent of the houses are being salvaged.

The work begins with clearing out debris, furniture, clothing and trash. That task has been taken on by PowerNet, a non profit that works with ex-offenders.

"These individuals are being given a second chance here in Dayton and they are running with it. The work ethic is there," Kent said.

Once the structure is cleared, it is gutted of all valuable materials such as trim, tubs and windows. By day three of the deconstruction, crews are preparing to knock the house on its side so it can be dismantled on the ground,

"We do that for safety," Kent said.

Dayton WorksPlus has applied for additional grants to continue deconstruction after the city contract is concluded. The organization also is willing to contract with private property owners to deconstruct.

"We're trying to refine the process so we can be competitive with a demolition crew," Kent said. "We are putting people to work. I really believe we are blessed to have this opportunity."

Reclaimed materials will be on display this weekend at the Miami Valley Home Improvement Show at Hara Arena in Trotwood.

Today only, Jan. 14, admission is free in lieu of a donation to the Deconstruction Depot.

At 1 p.m. on Sunday during the show, carpenters will give demonstrations on working with reclaimed lumber.

"It takes a lot of work, a lot of love, a lot of passion," Thompson said.

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