

Delaware State News

\$2.00

The State Capital Daily

Sunday, April 26, 2015



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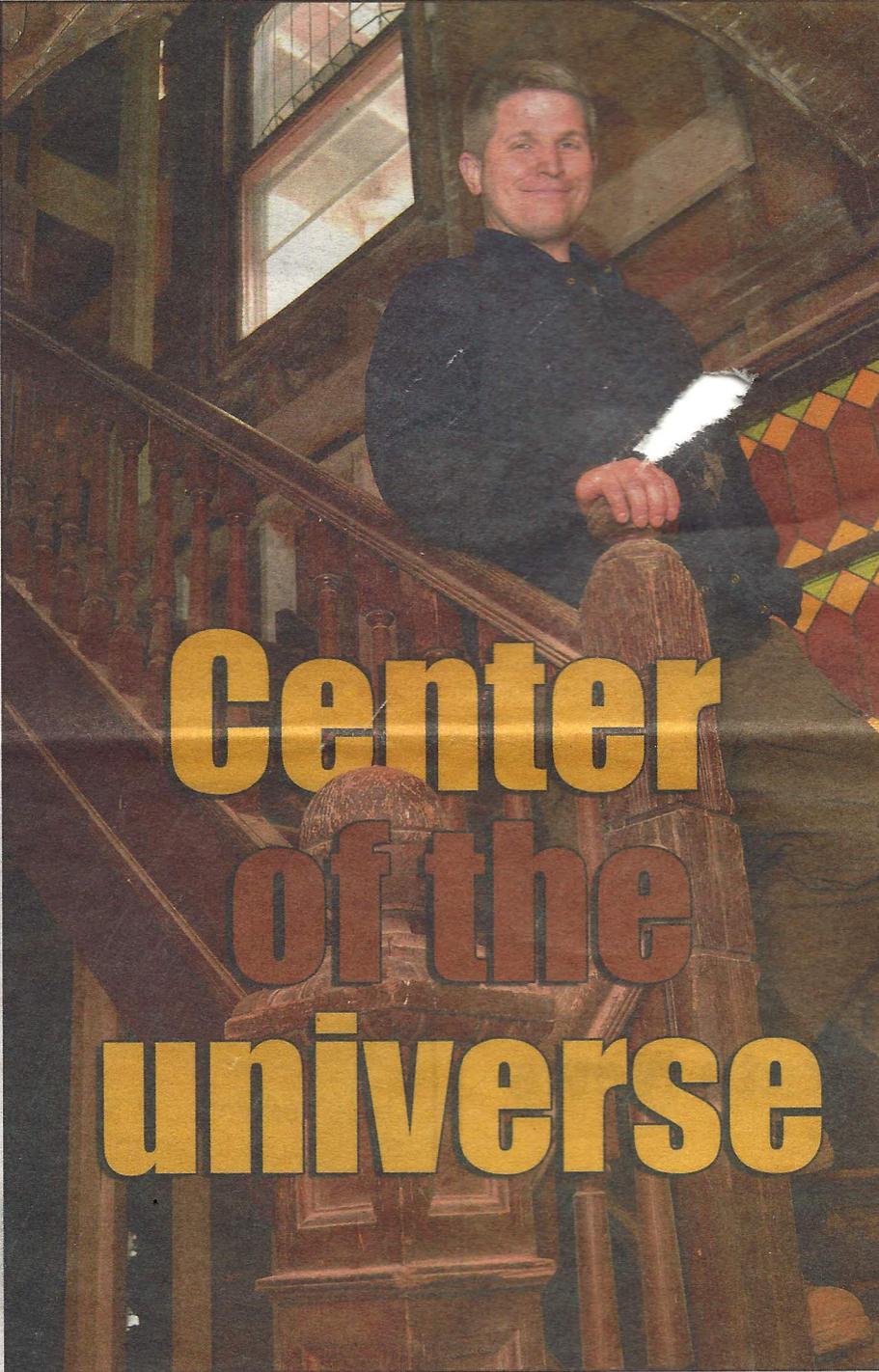
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Center of the universe

Delaware State News/Dave Chambers

Jacob Ferger of Magnolia stands inside the "Center of the Universe" house on South State Street in Magnolia Saturday afternoon. Mr. Ferger is renovating the entire property, including the stunning staircase in the entrance of the historic home.

Family finds joy, pitfalls turning a historic house into dream home

By Eleanor La Prade
Delaware State News

MAGNOLIA — Ever since she was a little girl, Jackie Ferger had driven past the century-old home on Main Street in Magnolia. And she had always loved it.

She thought then it looked like a "princess castle."

Built in the late 1800s or early 1900s — no one is certain of the exact year — the home originally belonged to Delaware farmer and peach baron John B. Lindale and his wife, Eliza.

In peeling paint, the sign outside the house proclaims: "This is Magnolia, the center of the universe, around which the earth revolves."

The peach and mango-colored house, built in the Queen Anne Revival style, features an elegant wrap-around porch, octagonal towers, bay windows and a summer kitchen in the back.

It's a conversation piece for anyone driving through town.

When Ms. Ferger saw the house for sale in January she sent pictures to her husband and her dad, who works as a contractor. "Can we do it?" she asked.

"We kind of felt like it was meant to be because they accepted our offer and we sold our house for exactly what we needed to put the down payment on this one," Ms. Ferger said. "So we felt like we were supposed to buy it."

The Lindale House, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, is definitely a fixer-upper.

To name a few problems, the plaster was falling off the wall and the ceilings; the electrical work was out-

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House

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dated; the slate roof needed to be replaced; there were holes in some of the floors. The house had extensive termite damage.

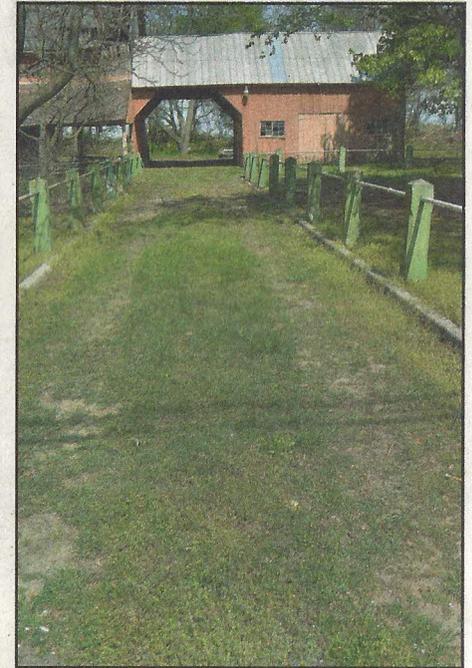
"When the bug inspector came in, he was like, 'Yes, you have a very healthy colony,'" Ms. Ferger said. Squirrels, snakes and bees have also taken up residence around the house.

Under the terms of their mortgage, the family needs to finish renovating the house by the end of July. Ms. Ferger said they borrowed as much as they could afford with their mortgage, and they're trying to "be creative" to cover everything.

"The major issue we have, of course, is time and money," she said. "We're working six days a week trying to get it done. We have family volunteers trying to help on the week-



The house will soon be restored to its original glory. Delaware State News/Dave Chambers



A lane to one of the back barns.

ends," she said.

She was standing on the second floor while she talked last weekend, in front of what will be her boys' rooms, Caleb, 9, and Ethan, 7. The couple also has 4-year-old twin daughters, Addison and Savannah.

"We can definitely picture the kids growing up here," she said. "We're really excited for them to grow up in a place with so much history."

Between working full time and raising their kids, the Fergers try to spend as much time as they can at the house.

Family members are also leading the work to restore the home. That day, they were busy taking out the old boiler and heating system.

Ms. Ferger said she and her husband hope to maintain as much of the home's history as they can.

"I know if we had unlimited funds we'd be able to restore a lot more of it. Some stuff we have to replace because we can't afford to restore it," she said.

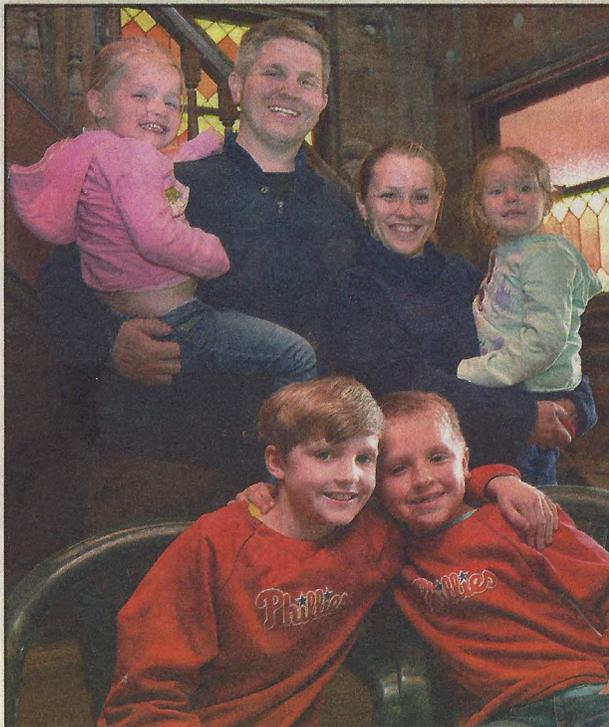
Before the Fergers bought it, the home belonged to retired schoolteacher and former Magnolia mayor Shirley Huddleston Jarrell.

For Ms. Jarrell, the Lindale House was also love at first sight. According to a 2006 Delaware State News article, she bought the home after Mrs. Lindale's death in the 1960s.

"I had seen this house as a little girl in my dreams," she was quoted in the article. "I would read encyclopedias and see pictures of Victorian homes and that's what I wanted."

"When I moved to Delaware, I drove by (the Lindale Mansion) and said, 'That's my house!'"

A white-painted home when she bought it, Ms. Jarrell said in the Delaware State News article that she decided to paint the house peach in honor of Mr. Lindale's peach baron title.



Jacob and Jacqueline Ferger of Magnolia pose inside the historic house with children, from left, Addison, 4; Caleb, 9, Ethan, 7 and Savannah, 4.

She had also seen the color in Victorian home journals.

According to Ms. Ferger, the original color was light green, then it was painted white.

Now the plan is to paint the home white again, possibly with rose and sage accents.

There are different accounts about how the "Center of the Universe" sign ended up there, Ms. Ferger said.

According to one story, the slogan came from an old town sign.

The couple plan to restore the sign. When a pipe broke, Ms. Ferger found a time capsule Ms. Jarrell buried in the yard; an old picture inside



A look at the "Center of the Universe" house on South State Street in Magnolia Saturday afternoon. The Lindale House is on the National Register of Historic Places.

showed the sign in its former glory, with artificial magnolia flowers entwined around it.

Although the family is working on a July deadline, some of the details will come later — the leaded glass, the shutters, the spindles.

The home sits on an acre and a half of property, and the family plans to fix up the outbuildings, including a two-person outhouse, a barn, a water tower and an office, when they're able to afford it.

Curious passersby pull into the house all the time, the Fergers said. Longtime residents, and even the mayor, have also stopped by.

"It seems like Magnolia is really

excited to see it fixed up," Ms. Ferger said. "Some people have said, 'What are you getting yourself into?' That's not as frequent but that is some reaction."

"I think more than anything I've gotten a lot of, 'Oh you're the one. You're the one who bought it.' And I'm like, 'Yeah, I'm the one I guess.'"

Some people say they wish they could have bought it.

"I didn't realize so many people felt the same way about this house that I did. I really didn't know," Ms. Ferger said.

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