

There Glows the Neighborhood

The Blue Victorian is a New Jewel in Jeffersonville

Well-wishers and curious customers attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony at The Blue Victorian after noon, welcoming owners Maurice Seaton and Greg Brooks to a lively and growing Jeffersonville with their new gift and antiques store on the first floor and art gallery upstairs, and to see the results of an artful renovation.

But if walls could talk, as the saying

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goes, they would tell the amazing history of multiple transformations of the building - originally built in the 1890s as a single-family home, and later used as a commercial bakery in the 1970s, as a fireplace store with office space into the mid-1980s, as a four-family dwelling into the early 1990s, and then as a storage space - and now as retail and gallery space to be enjoyed by local residents and weekenders looking for country charm.

This is the third renovation project for Seaton and Brooks, who, like many of Sullivan County's newer citizens, live part-time in Manhattan but who are working to make the beauty and peacefulness of country living more of their everyday lives. Before working on The Blue Victorian - they did most of the demolition and some of the renovation work themselves - they restored two houses in Hortonsville. Greg was a banker for 20 years, looking for a career change; Maurice was a diplomat with the South African mission to the U.N. and now works with the Episcopal Church



PAINTED SKY blue and crowned with a shiny golden finial on its turret, Jeffersonville's newest gift shop and gallery, The Blue Victorian, had its grand opening Saturday. Below, a 1906 view of the town shows the original building in the distance at the bend in Main Street. VAN K. MORROW PHOTO; BELOW, TOWNE CRIER COLLECTION

Foundation, a non-for-profit research organization, when he's not working at the new business.

Luckily, the mortared stone basement foundation and the basic structure were in good shape, even though the house is over 100 years old. The first thing they did was to replace the heating system. At one time, the entire house used expensive electric heat, but three new kerosene heaters installed on the ground floor, small in size but very efficient, throw enough heat to travel up to the second floor. "Because it now houses a business," notes Seaton, "we don't have to leave the heat turned up at night."

The demolition that filled four 15-yard dumpsters involved ripping out four kitchens and many false walls that segmented the house, at one time wide open with plenty of air and light, into four small apartments. Plumbing that would no longer be used for sinks and appliances was simply capped off. The electrical system, although old, was found to be sufficient and safe.

"We went into the house sort of knowing what to expect," said Brooks, "so there were no real horror stories. But, we had some very pleasant surprises when we removed layers of sheetrock," he adds, referring to well-preserved wood



wall paneling, to the newel post and spindles on the staircase, and doors and windows which once opened to the outside but which were covered over when an additional room was added on the back of the house. They call it the "shoebox room," and will eventually rent it to a business complementary to The Blue Victorian.

An inviting feature of the house, and one of the best surprises, is the beauty of the now-restored yellow pine floors, at one time covered with glue and two layers of linoleum. "The floors are original to the house," said Brooks, "and when we pulled up the linoleum with a heat gun and a scraper, we wondered why anyone would ever cover them up. The floors were professionally sanded, refinished and polyurethaned, and that's what you see **BLUE VICTORIAN**, page 16



JEFFERSONVILLE MAYOR Ed Justus does the honors at the ribbon cutting for The Blue Victorian while Maurice Seaton, left, and Greg Brooks look on. At top, one of the galleries, currently featuring local artisan Jill Wiener's stoneware and pottery.