Rockwell, Bentley seek to raise funds for Roy House renovations

Venerable structure in “rapidly deteriorating condition,” says debate team head

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Parricia Rockwell, new head of USL Speech and Debate, along with the retired Doris Bentley, are searching for funds to renovate the J. Alfred Roy House which serves as the home for the USL Speech and Debate team.

"Since I've been at the university and have been using the Roy House as an office space, I've noticed that the building is in a rapidly deteriorating condition," said Rockwell. "There are things wrong with the house that are more than just cosmetic. It really needs some work."

The house, located at the corner of Johnston St. and University Ave., is a remnant of Lafayette's architectural heritage. Built in 1901, it is unique to the area for its Queen Anne revival style and the Eastlake staircase, one of the most intricate and elaborate residential staircases in the city.

Rockwell suggested some renovations that may help to preserve this landmark. She mentioned that the front door was in bad shape, old carpeting needed to be removed, and some wiring in the house was faulty and needed to be replaced.

The architectural detail of the Roy House's Eastlake staircase is hidden behind layers of paint and years of neglect.

"The speech and debate students and I have cleaned out the house and removed some furniture that the university no longer wanted," she continued. "But to make the house look like it once was it'll need renovation."

Mike Bridges, head of USL building maintenance, disagreed.

"We feel the house has been adequately maintained," he said. "The house may look to be in bad shape but it really isn't. We don't judge the building to be in bad enough shape."

"Building renovations are done on an as-needed basis," said Facility and Planning manager William Crist. "If a building needs to be renovated, a work request is placed in my office and then we determine what needs to be done. All work requests are done in the order that we receive them. As far as I know, no one at the Roy House has put in any work request."

Rockwell said she issued a work request for some minor repairs to be done. She admitted that because the request was recent it might not have reached the Physical Plant yet. Bentley also mentioned that she spoke to Bridges about the state of the Roy House, and that he said he would attempt to do the repairs she requested.

Rockwell added that she has spoken to several people about finding grant money to cover the renovation process.

"So far I haven't had much luck," she said, "but I've only just started a few weeks ago. I've spoken to Jonathan Fricker with the National Register of Historic Places in Baton Rouge and he's been helpful in giving me leads on places to look."

"I'm also speaking to Doris Bentley," she continued. "Bentley was instrumental in getting the French House refurbished and I've spoken to her about getting help for the Roy House."

"We're currently looking for money to renovate the house," Bentley said, "but the cost would be very high, and the university simply doesn't have the money to take care of buildings and try to maintain educational programs."

"Most of the sources of funds have dried up," she continued. "Places that I've looked before don't have anything to give us. It doesn't look like we'll be able to find anything anytime soon."

Cast responded to an inquiry of the source of renovation funds, such as the money set aside for Dupré Library.

"The money the library got to do renovations is part of the state's Capital Outlay, and was appropriated by the state legislature," said Crist. "None of that money approved by the state legislature was given to USL as a fund for the university for general building renovation—it's specifically earmarked for the library."

Although the Roy House is on the National Register of Historic Places, money and public outcry may be its only protection.

"Being on the National Register doesn't prevent the homes from being torn down or left to fall apart," said Bruce Turner, Head of Archives and Special Collections at Dupré Library. "I know of some homes that have been torn down—it just takes more paperwork to do it. The deeds to these homes are still in the names of the owners, and they ultimately decide what to do with them."

USL has full ownership of the Roy House and subsequently has precedent over its status on the National Register.

"We have more than 200 buildings on campus," Crist said. "Regardless of any status the Roy House may have as historic, we do work only when it's requested because we have so much else to take care of. We have limited crews, but we try to do our best."