

## Cardinal Ritter birthplace home ready for a tenant

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— David Hock remembers meeting Cardinal Joseph Ritter when he was 10 years old at a reception at St. Mary's Catholic Church in New Albany.

He was so intrigued with meeting a Catholic Cardinal that he even rode his bike to Ritter's birthplace with his good friend, William Lori, who is currently bishop of the Archdiocese of Bridgeport, Conn., and knocked on the door.

Today, Hock is on a different mission. He wants to make sure the home where Ritter grew up is preserved and becomes a focal point for the neighborhood that surrounds it.

His mission is nearing completion.

"My interest in this house started at an early age," he said.

The front portion of the Ritter birthplace house — located at 1218 E. Oak St. in New Albany — is complete. The middle section, which will house a museum honoring Ritter, and the back addition, which will serve as a community room, still needs work. However, the Ritter Birthplace Foundation Committee, headed by Hock, is looking for a nonprofit tenant to occupy the building.

Greg Sekula — director of Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana's southern district office and a member of the Ritter Foundation — said an open house for nonprofits will be held in July.

"We want them to know the house is available," he said. "We have talked to a few people."

Hock said \$518,000 has been spent on the structure. Included in that total are free supplies and labor. A large portion of the funds were donated by the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County.

"Without them, we couldn't have done it," Hock said.

To finish the middle portion and the rear addition, Hock said another \$160,000 to \$175,000 is needed. He said he would like to see the entire structure finished early next year.

"We're pretty far along. Getting the front portion completed and ready for a tenant is huge," Hock said.

The push to get the house to this point began five years ago. The house was saved from demolition by the Historic Landmarks Foundation.

Hock said he spoke to St. Meinrad Archabbott Lambert Reilly who "put in perspective what we might have here and that it needed to be saved for prosperity's sake."

Hock said since the front part of the house is completed, it should help with fundraising.

"This has really been a community effort," he said. "So many people have gotten behind this."

And that effort is finally paying dividends.

"It was important that we renovated the house to honor the history of the structure and to honor the Ritter family," Sekula said.

Ritter was born in the house in 1892 and is the only Roman Catholic Cardinal from Indiana. While he served as archbishop of Indianapolis, he called for racial integration of high schools in 1937. He did the same in St. Louis in 1947 and was elevated to cardinal in 1961.

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Photos



The Cardinal Joseph Ritter birthplace, at 1218 E. Oak St. in New Albany, has been restored, both inside and out, and is ready for a tenant. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen



A fireplace inside the Ritter home prior to renovation. Ogoto by Greg Sekula



A fireplace in the Ritter home following renovation.