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# At Home

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JONATHAN QUILTER | DISPATCH PHOTOS

Pastor Tim Heintzelman of the Faith Covenant Church in Westerville anoints a home that will become a halfway house for Christian men just out of prison — 150 years after it served as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

## Divine outcome

Home with history on its side will serve others once again

By Jim Weiker • THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

One of the most historic properties in Columbus is finding a new purpose, one that resonates with the old. • The property, at the northwest corner of Westerville and Ferris roads, contains a 250-foot-long earthen mound built by Adena Indians. Centuries later, the stately brick home on the site served as a stop on the Underground Railroad. • Such a rich history made it perfect for Greg and Tricia Allenby, a Worthington couple trying to aid Christian men who have been released from prison. • The two learned | See **History** Page H6



The home, purchased by Greg and Tricia Allenby, was built in the late 1850s.



**History**

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the house was available after they had searched months for a home to serve as a sanctuary for the men.

The property's history was appealing.

"We know we stand on hallowed ground," Greg Allenby told a group recently gathered at the house for dedication of the ministry.

"It was hallowed 6,000 years ago with the Indians. It was hallowed 150 years ago with the Underground Railroad. We hope it to remain hallowed as we conduct our ministry."

The Allenbys aren't alone in seeing a divine hand at work.

"Greg really believes this whole thing has been orchestrated by God, and I guess I think so, too," said Jay Stanley, the Howard Hanna agent who sold the home.

"I tried six months to sell this house and had several people interested, but it never seemed to happen," Stanley said. "I think this was just meant to be."

The 3,704-square-foot home was built in the late 1850s by businessman Zenus Jackson on a 3-acre parcel in the middle of the ancient earthworks, which rise a foot or two in a giant U around the home.

The mound is one of about 70 prehistoric earthworks found in central Ohio, according to the Ohio Historical Society.

Although the mounds are thought to be ceremonial sites, Brent Eberhard, archaeology survey manager for the society, said their exact purpose remains unknown.

Jackson's house, dubbed "Jackson Fort" or "Fort Jackson," was the first home on what was then called Westerville Plank Road.

The first floor of the estate includes a bedroom, living room, dining room, office, kitchen and half-bath. Three more bedrooms and a full bath can be found on the second floor.

Floors are covered in wide cherry planks while walnut trim embroiders the house. Walls rise 12 feet on the first floor and 10 on the second. The 18-inch-thick brick walls and the massive stone foundation serve as testaments to the home's age.

The basement contains two once-hidden crawl spaces that were exposed during plumbing renovations and are thought to have been hiding spots for slaves on the Underground Railroad.

In 1974, the home was listed on the National Register of Historic Places because of the mounds. Today, it is one of the few houses along a commercial strip of Westerville Road dotted with used-car lots, warehouses and trailer parks.

The Allenbys had been ministering to felons in Chillicothe, London and Madison, Ohio, prisons for several years when they decided a year ago to take



JONATHAN QUILTER | DISPATCH PHOTOS

Tricia and Greg Allenby purchased the 3,704-square-foot home after months of searching.



A once-hidden basement crawl space, one of two in the house, is thought to have been a hiding place for escaped slaves.

► For more photos of the house, visit [Dispatch.com/photos](http://Dispatch.com/photos).

► For a video from the dedication, visit [Dispatch.com/multimedia](http://Dispatch.com/multimedia).

the next step.

In May, they bought a 1920s two-story home on Agler Road that provides shelter for men out of prison.

Managing the Agler Road home is Benjamin Graham, who served time at London Correctional Institution for drug possession and now helps the Allenbys put together the "Friends Indeed" newsletter sent to prisons.

"Guys were getting out with nowhere to go," said Graham, whose poems and essays are featured in the newsletter. "They get dropped off at the bus station Downtown. They might go to a shelter or try to go back home. I know some who never made it to either place."

The Allenbys say the Westerville Road home will be a "three-quarters" house. Unlike a traditional halfway house, which serves men and women directly out of prison, the home will house up to a dozen men for a year who have jobs and are more settled into society but not quite ready for their own place.

The night the Allenbys closed on the home, they hosted the Fort Jackson dedication. With its participatory prayers, frequent "Amens" and group singing (*Battle Hymn of the Republic*), the scene could have

played out 150 years ago in the same parlor among Underground Railroad workers.

The house's history of salvation rang through the prayers and ceremony.

"Just as this house has played such a role in getting people free, Lord, let it now set these men free," Greg Allenby said.

Tim Heintzelman, pastor of the Allenbys' church, Faith Covenant Church in Westerville, anointed the house.

"The theme of redemption is alive here," Heintzelman said. "The people of the house were redeeming slaves. We're redeeming souls."

The home will be managed by Brian Hall, a former drug addict who works in outreach for Columbus Neighborhood Health Center when not preaching at his storefront church.

"Anybody could have bought this house, but they didn't," said Hall, who dubs himself the commander of Fort Jackson. "Now we're seeing the continuation of the history of the house serving to help one another."

Hall moved into the house and will help oversee improvements before others join him. The home needs a second full bathroom, some roof and soffit work, and some cosmetic attention, but Hall and others expect it to soon be ready for residents.

"We want men to come here. We'll open our arms to them and let them know there's a better life."

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