

Mansion at Dominican to get \$6 million facelift

By Joe Wolfcale

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Dominican University officials hope to transform a 19th-century Queen Anne Victorian house into a student and alumni center, a small campus museum and a chapel that caused a flap earlier this year.

The Dominican University Board of Trustees this month unanimously authorized restoration and renovation of Edgehill Mansion, the oldest structure on the San Rafael campus. Officials have estimated the cost at \$6 million.

The mansion, formerly the Babcock estate at the intersection of Magnolia and Palm avenues, was built in 1887 and served as a residence and dining hall and later as classrooms and offices. It was the site of the university's Garden School preschool that operated for more than 50 years. Edgehill was closed to the public in 1985 because of structural concerns.

"This is really an exciting project for us," Dominican President Joseph Fink said. "The beauty of it is we're demonstrating our respect for the past and hopefully preparing for the future and the needs of our students, alumni and the community. It's been used over the years for many things."

Project director Jane Winter said the 15,000-square-foot, three-story building will house the university's St. Catherine Bennincasa Chapel and a separate interfaith worship area on the first floor. It also will house university archives, including a collection of Ansel Adams photographs and other university memorabilia.

The university scrapped proposed plans for an 8,500-square-foot multifaith chapel earlier this year after the cost ballooned to an estimated \$9.3 million. Also, fundraising efforts stalled when alumni who supported a Catholic chapel objected to the multifaith aspect of the project. The university refunded more than \$200,000 contributed by alumni.

The second floor will serve as a hub of student activities, housing a campus ministry, student government offices, residence life and student support services. The third floor will be home to the university's alumni relations office.

Winter said the building's brick foundation will have to be replaced at a cost of about \$500,000. Two ornate statues will be moved from another chapel to the Edgehill chapel; the university will preserve as much as possible of the building's intricate woodwork, a carved mahogany fireplace and cast bronze doorknobs and fixtures.

"She has some really good bones," Winter said. "It just needs some tender loving care and a new foundation."

The plan also calls for a new roof, a fresh coat of paint, landscaping and other enhancements. Officials said they will also meet current safety and Americans with Disabilities Act requirements in the renovation plan.

The university has consulted with Diana Painter, a Sonoma County architectural historian, on the mansion's restoration, Winter said.

Winter said the proposal has been submitted to San Rafael city officials and is awaiting design review approval. After that, the building permitting process will begin. Construction could begin next summer, Winter said.

Fundraising is not expected to be a problem, Fink said. A committee has been formed, mostly of alumni.

The university's board of trustees has pledged \$500,000 to the project. In addition, the university has challenged the alumni group that it would match the funds if alumni could raise \$1.5 million.

Dominican serves 2,140 students. Edgehill was purchased by the Dominican sisters in 1920 and greeted its first students on Aug. 30 that year.

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