

Nomination
HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The George David Bihl House, located at 2803 Fredericksburg Road in San Antonio, is imminently worthy of receiving the San Antonio Conservation Society's annual Historic Preservation award. The structure was built in 1920 by owner/real estate developer/cattleman Bihl and is considered to be the last remaining original residence on Fredericksburg Road inside Loop 410.* The building experienced a checkered history as private residence, restaurant, antique shop, etc., until 1990's when it had deteriorated into a graffiti-covered, roofless eyesore ([see attached "before" photograph](#)). It was virtually the only structure remaining in a 40 acre plot on a busy thoroughfare, an area much coveted by various would-be developers, most of whose plans greatly disturbed the surrounding residential owners and commercial entities. After several false starts and much agitation by neighborhood associations and the Monticello Park Historic District of which it is part, a Dallas-based real estate company in 2003 came up with a proposal for the "Primrose at Monticello Park" senior citizen apartment complex which pleased all parties. The new developer first planned to demolish the "rundown mess," as described by a local journalist but, upon learning of the neighborhood determination to save the building and its historic nature, more than \$200,000.00 was designated for restoration of the structure and inclusion in the housing complex.

Aileen Bihl Locklar, George Bihl's 92 year-old daughter, said in a telephone interview** that her father used stones from the demolished downtown St. Mary's Church and that she was told the blocks originally were from a stone fence surrounding the Alamo. The square two-story limestone structure with beautiful decorative lintels on the front façade has been faithfully restored with two exception, both due to financial limitations: (1) The interior, which now features a floor made of 100-year old pine boards brought in from an outside source to replace the original cherry flooring, too badly deteriorated for reuse, is lacking its original second floor because an ADA-required elevator could not be figured into the budget; and (2) the front porch (see attached historic photo) was not reconstructed, again due to financial restrictions. Elimination of the porch, however, offers the advantage of revealing the handsome abovementioned hand-carved lintels which were largely obscured by the porch.

At present, the Bihl House is enjoying a new life in which it plays an important role as space for Primrose residents' and community meetings, poetry readings and art exhibitions featuring area professional artists. It may also serve as the northern anchor of Fredericksburg Road's "Deco District" arts corridor.

Although the house is historically and architecturally significant in its own right, the project is particularly to be commended in that it represents a successful cooperative effort among private, business and city interests. Then-City councilmen Julian Castro, in whose district the development is located, was quoted as stating, "It's a terrific example of community collaboration and will be a welcome addition that is not simply going to help revitalize the neighborhood, but enliven it as well." ***

* Johanna Williams, San Antonio Conservation Society researcher, 2003

** Charlotte Kahl, local historian, February 19, 2002

*** [San Antonio Express Neighbors West/Northwest](#), November 9, 20005

Respectfully submitted,

Marianna C. Jones
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