

## Open house at 1912 home to benefit Gibsonville historical group

By Steve Huffman / Special to the Times-News

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GIBSONVILLE — Jerry Nix has been asked whether spending more than a year redoing an old funeral home has given him the creeps.

To which he replies: Nah.

“No one died in this house,” Nix said.

Then he chuckled before continuing, “But people have died to get in.”



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Not in quite a while, though.

Nix, 63, is in giving new life (pardon the pun) to the old Bartlett Funeral Home on Church Street in Gibsonville. It’s a stately structure that measures more than 2,800 square feet, a beautiful place that Nix has spent almost a year and a half returning to its former grandeur.

He’s on the home stretch.

An open house is planned for Saturday and Sunday where townspeople and anyone else with an interest can stop by for a tour. Proceeds go to the Gibsonville Museum and Historical Society's capital campaign and efforts to secure a permanent home for the display of the museum's artifacts.

A yard sale where a variety of historical items will be offered is part of the tour.

### **Glory and decline**

The former Bartlett Funeral Home has a storied past. It was built in 1912 as a residence for Dr. J.V. Dick and his wife, Blanche. Dr. Dick was a general practitioner in an era when there were such things as general practitioners. For decades he had an office in downtown Gibsonville.

The Dicks' home was a showplace, with a wraparound porch and high, stately ceilings.

Dr. Dick died in 1941 at 65, and shortly thereafter his wife moved to Whitsett to live with family members. Their house remained furnished but unoccupied.

It stayed uninhabited until 1958 when Bill Bartlett Jr. and his wife, Colene, purchased the property for use as Bartlett Funeral Home and ambulance service. They held a grand opening in October 1959.

The Bartletts did a fair amount of work to the house for its conversion to a funeral home. A portion of the porch was enclosed, and several interior walls were knocked out to make room for a chapel and visiting area.

An 1,800-foot addition at the rear made space for services such as embalming. The new portion also included an office and a showroom for coffins. Meanwhile, the Bartletts made their residence upstairs, converting it to better suit their needs.

For years, their funeral home did a big business.

Bill Bartlett died in 1998, and his wife died in 2012. The last funeral was held at the home around 2000.

After the death of Mrs. Bartlett, time and Mother Nature took their toll on the house. In 2014, a huge tree fell across the rear addition, crushing the second story. For more than two years, much of the house was exposed to the elements, and decline was inevitable.

Neighbors complained, and the town was threatening to raze the structure when Nix, chairman of the town's Museum and Historical Society, purchased the property from Michael Pope, the nephew of Colene Bartlett.

"The town was getting anxious," Nix said. "It'd reached the point where someone was either going to have to fix it or it was going to be torn down. It's safe to say it would have been demolished if something hadn't been done."

### **Preserving history**

Nix, who works as president of Harris Johnson Industries and vice president of Stage Rigging Services, both of Greensboro, is a lifelong resident of eastern Guilford County. This is the 10th historic structure in and around Gibsonville he's played an intricate role in saving.

"Jerry's probably done more for historical properties in this area than anyone I know of," said Deleno Flynn, a retired Gibsonville town manager and vice chairman of the Museum and Historical Society. "His heart is in preserving history, and he puts his money where his heart is."

Nix said he attempts to research as well as possible the structures he's restoring, to learn as much as he can about them, so he can return them closely to the way they looked new, though he admits to a fair amount of leeway when it comes to refurbishing bathrooms and kitchens. He said restoring the former Bartlett Funeral Home was made easier because Colene Bartlett had saved a great deal of information about the house.

One of the first things Nix did after buying the house was have the addition at the rear knocked down. In the original structure, he's replaced the interior walls and removed the enclosure that had been added to the wraparound porch. Stairways and bannisters have been reworked and restored, and fireplaces are back where they were when the house was new.

Nix has studied the walls for "ghost marks," tell-tale signs that might give hints as to what went where in the home's early days. The work that has gone into the restoration is mind-boggling. The plumbing has been reworked, and the HVAC system replaced. Insulation has been added.

The kitchen is new, as are bathrooms and more.

At the very least, anything that didn't get moved got a fresh coat of paint.

“It’s almost a new house,” Nix said of the resulting three bedroom, two-and-a-half bath structure he plans to list for sale in the coming weeks.

“It’s definitely one of the better houses in town.”

Chris Gann of Gann Construction of McLeansville is general contractor for the project. This is the fourth restoration project of Nix’s in which he’s been involved.

Gann said Nix is a hands-on owner, not the type to sit back and order his help around.

“He’s worked about as hard on it as I have, I tell you that,” Gann said. “He ain’t afraid of hard work.”

Nix smiled as he listened to the words of praise, but said he only feels he’s doing his part to help preserve that which deserves to be preserved.

“We’re just trying to make a difference,” he said.