

Former teacher happy to save schoolhouse

By Erica Rodefer, Times Staff Writer
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Pat Greenwald is a self-proclaimed history and restoration freak.

She lives in Sykesville in a restored house built in 1720.

In 1989, the retired Howard County teacher helped one of her classes raise \$16,500, leading the fight to save Pfeiffer's Corner, a historic one-room schoolhouse in Howard County.

"History doesn't have to be Mount Vernon or Monticello," Greenwald said. "It's important that children know that common folks had history, too - that we all had history."

So when Sykesville Mayor Jonathan Herman needed someone to head the town's Colored Schoolhouse restoration project, it made sense to call upon Greenwald.

"Pat has been instrumental for years in trying to save schoolhouses," Herman said. "She understands the school curriculum and knows an awful lot about the subject. We got very lucky to find somebody with her background and passion for schoolhouses."

The Colored Schoolhouse, at 518 Schoolhouse Road, served as a school for black children in southern Carroll County and western Howard County from 1904 to 1938.

Greenwald said it's one of the few black schoolhouses still in existence today.

"A lot of African-American culture has been lost because the buildings are not the big impressive buildings," Greenwald said. "I think it's important that it be saved for the black community."

It's now been 21½ years since Greenwald became the restoration coordinator for the schoolhouse, and officials say it will open its doors as a school field trip destination in August 2006.

The opening date has been pushed back two years in a row, but Herman said this year the goal is within the town's reach.

"We're so close," he said.

The town restored the outside of the building five years ago, so the interior has remained in good condition, and repainted it in 2002.

Greenwald has fashioned programs for field trips centered on historical studies appropriate for different age groups.

The programming is based on her 25 years of experience as a gifted-and-talented teacher.

"As mobile as our society is, it's important for kids to see what was there before them - that there's

something bigger than the right here and now," Greenwald said.

She's even rummaged antique shops and the Internet auction site eBay to collect old books, historic furniture, an antique bell and a 1908 American flag.

She used \$500 raised by a club at Johns Hopkins University and other donations from the Sykesville Historic District Committee.

Greenwald said that money has gone a long way because people are so supportive of the schoolhouse they throw in extras.

"Any time that I've bought a book on eBay and put a little note that it will be put to good use in a schoolhouse we're restoring, I'll end up getting two in the mail instead," she said.

Almost everything is in place for a fall opening, except the \$30,000 in repairs and renovations, which the town hopes it can achieve through donations.

The building needs to have plumbing, heat and air-conditioning units installed, electrical work, drywall, paint and a fence as well as other finishing touches.

Greenwald said she hopes to have the heat working by February so some of the school's alumni can come to reminisce and provide more details about the building's history.

She said she wants to pass that history along to present-day students.

"I know that students are not going to remember the facts and things that they learn," she said, "but it would be nice if they could just get an appreciation and respect for old things."

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