Today on *Across the Fence* an historic home moves closer to becoming the new home for alumni at the University of Vermont. We will see some of the precision craft work that's being done by Vermonters as we learn about the efforts to renovate and restore this 120 year old landmark. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us; I am Judy Simpson. It is a gorgeous 18,000 square foot home on Summit Street in Burlington. It was added to the National Register of Historic Homes in 1979 back when it was used as a Delta Psi fraternity house. Two years ago the home was acquired by the University of Vermont and now work is underway to make it be the alumni house for use by UVM alumnus and the alumni association. Joining me is one of those alums, Alan Ryea. He's a native of Richford and a UVM graduate, and now the vice president for alumni relations at UVM. Welcome and thanks so much for being with us.

Alan.: Thank you Judy.

Judy.: You were with us a couple of years ago when this project was just getting off the ground. Can you give us an update?

Alan.: Yes it's been pretty exciting. I speak for all of my colleagues at the University of Vermont Foundation in saying that we're very excited to be a part of this transformational effort that's taking place with the alumni house that began two years ago as you alluded to. Our feasibility study which allowed us to bring to life a vision for what this house could be and what it could mean to alums at the University of Vermont. We're now taking the second major step forward with the project. That's the focus on the exterior stabilization and renovation of the property itself. For a home that's been in place over 100 years and in to work a lot of seasonal changes in Vermont it was in need of significant repair and renovations to the exterior of the building to bring it back to the condition that we would like to see.

Judy.: Tell me about funding for the project because it's a big project.

Alan.: It is an extremely big project and one of the things that makes this project you need at UVM is that it's going to be 100% financed by individual contributions. I'm pleased to report that our campaign is moving along and we're nearing three million dollars in commitments for the project that really allowed us to accomplish what we've been able to do with the first two phases of this project.
Judy.: Has the scope of the project changed?

Alan.: It hasn't; all have remained focused and committed to creating a home at the university that embodies both the physical and emotional connection that we want homes to have with a lifelong engagement with the University of Vermont and we're thrilled that 61 Summit Street is going to be the place.

Judy.: Can you tell me a little bit about the creation of the UVM Foundation?

Alan.: The UVM Foundation launched in January and the alumni association was proud to be a part of the foundation. We share a common goal of engaging alumni to the life of the university that maximizes both of our personal and philanthropic investment in the institution. Of the beauty of the alumni association being a part of the foundation is that many alumni engage with the university through the three unions and activities that makes the association the front door for the university and that lifelong entry point back to the institution itself.

Judy.: We're going to take a few minutes to see and learn about some of the work that's taking place at the alumni house. Across the Fence recently spoke with some Vermonters who are proud to be part of the renovation and restoration of this landmark home.

I'm the proud parent of two UVM grads. They spent four years here as students and now they will spend a lifetime as alumni and this will be their focal point in their connection to the university for the rest of their lives as it will be for every other university alum from UVM. Very high marks to the facility’s design and construction part of UVM for having the foresight and for the university itself to preserve this not only for the university community but for the Vermont community. It is a once in a lifetime opportunity for me personally because there are not any buildings like this in Chittenden County except this one. I was lucky enough to be a part of it. The subcontracting crews we've amassed here for the project feel the same way. This is very special. Their professionalism their dedication to bringing this building back to life and knowing it will be our collective legacy for a long time to come. All of those things make it very special. To walk in the first day and go whoa--boy I'm tearing this apart with my bare hands. And then have the vision, to see that vision slowly come into focus as the roofing was repaired as the masonry was repaired as the windows got repaired as we did our part painting the exterior woodwork and then to have Matt come along and put the coat of paint on it. Put the lipstick on the end. That's the real gratifying thing. To see that exterior slowly come into focus and it looks just like the picture I had imagined. This building was built with a lot of attention to detail a lot of craftsmanship. The building was designed to be around for centuries. If it's mistreated with modern material, which they often are, they're not around for centuries. Modern materials are incompatible with the old natural and organic materials. This is way before any architectural standards came about and standardizing brick length width or height or any of that stuff. This is just a processed local probably high sulfate sediment stone similar to limestone probably brought right out of these yellow quarries somewhere around here that are all over the place. This is the way it's been done for thousands and thousands of years before the advent of poured cement in 1874. And we had to make this raised joint, with these brass slickers. We made them by hand and then proceeded to go about the tedious business of raking out all the joints and this actual buttress here was totally cataloged. Each stone dismantled this wall dismantled and put back exactly the way it was built. It takes a good degree of organization. I
have a great crew and we went through and did not just the stone but all the brick and you can’t see any of the repairs on the brick or the stone. Then we clean the building chemically cleaned the whole building to take off 100 years of atmospheric carbonized dirt and what-not so it looks beautiful.

When I put my hands on that piece of craftsmanship and realized that some craftsmen 120 years ago made that with his or her ingenuity and imagination and I get to bring it back to life and put my hands where he had his hands was really meaningful to me. It's important that these buildings are treated by people and cared for by people that actually understand how these buildings function. They function almost like a living organism where they expand and contract take in water and expel water. All the materials have to work in harmony with a bust each other apart. You know you can make it look like this but is just not this.

Judy.: That's some of the great work being done on the new UVM alumni house and that's only part of it. In just a minute we are going to see some of the interior glass and wood work that's also being done by local crafters. Back here in the studio I'm with UVM vice president for alumni and relations. Alan Ryea, and joining us is Penrose Jackson another UVM alum who is active in the alumni association. You must be excited to see the progress that's been made on the alumni house it's amazing.

Penrose.: It's fabulous and I mentioned earlier when I first came to see the house and experience the house the very first weekend of my freshman year it was a love affair from the start. Being able to be back at UVM to be involved and a part of this project is thrilling.

Judy.: Tell us about your role with the alumni association and your affiliation?

Penrose.: I'm on the alumni association board and I think I've been there three or four years. I also have the privilege of chairing the awards committee which is the best volunteer work I've ever done. When this opportunity came up to be on a committee to help oversee this I jumped at chance.

Judy.: What are some of the key things that you want the more than 36,000 UVM alumni who live in Vermont to know about this house?

Penrose.: It's a way we can all come home to UVM. I was reflecting driving in this morning how even though I've lived in Burlington since I graduated I didn't connect with UVM until I started becoming involved with the alumni office. I didn't have a place to connect. Other sports event or a cultural event. I didn't have a place to come home to and I think this will change that dramatically.

Judy.: Do think there are a lot of grads who feel that way? And a lot of people just don't look back.

Penrose.: Yes and another thing that the foundation and this alumni association was thinking a lot more about is the fact when you do begin your freshman year you are a future alum and how did we engage people right from the get go.

Judy.: I think that's great. Alan is there a date for when the project is expected to be finalized?
Alan.: Yes we have the end in sight. The goal is to officially open the building in the fall of 2015 and that would coincide with the public launch of the university's next fund raising campaign. We're hoping to welcome everyone into our home at the alumni house in honor of that occasion.

Judy.: Tell me about progress of this project. We were talking earlier and you said it was great we had a mild winter because things are ahead of schedule.

Alan.: Things are ahead of schedule. The restoration project we were anticipating would take about 18 months. Were able to do that in less than a year given the light winter we had. And we were able to get some other things accomplished during that phase of the construction project that we had not anticipated being able to do.

Judy.: I mentioned earlier that there's some intricate glass and wood work that's being done by local crafts people. Let's start talking about the wood. What kind of work has been done and who is doing it?

Alan.: Ron Wanamaker from Wanamaker Studios is working on the woodwork and the house is adorned by a number of very ornate wood carvings that were put in place by Albert Whittican who is also famous for putting some of his work in the New York Public Library. What you see here is the carvings are made from natural pine. And over the course of 120 Vermont winters they've seen their wear and tear. So a major amount of restoration needs to be done on those. Some of the restoration can be done in place. Others like you see here have been taken to the studio and required the wood to be resurfaced to add a level of depth in detail back to those carvings that were there originally. Some of these carvings are as large as 4 and 5 feet believe it or not and as we're taking them down from the building he found that they were held together simply by finger joints. The process of doing restoration as you see here but putting it back together is like putting a mosaic back on the building. I was really thrilled with the level of detail. As you can see the amount of sanding that needs to go into place to bring that back to its natural state is tremendous. But the finished product is something we are extremely proud of.

Judy.: I think what surprises me is the first people that still know how to do these crafts.

Alan.: And local a we're very fortunate that a member of the trades that we're able to put in place in the first phase of stabilization have been local Vermont artisans.

Judy.: You became part of this project since the beginning. It must be fascinating to watch this all come together and the changes that are taking place.

Alan.: Fascinating--and excited the project is moving along and the end is in sight everyone involved wishes we could make it happen faster than what it is because the end product is going to transform the way people reconnect with the university.

Judy.: Let's talk a little bit about some of the glass work that's being done because there's a lot of glass in the building as well.

Alan.: Absolutely. Similar to the wood carvings of almost every vantage point of the house you can see a wonderful piece of stained glass. On the first floor alone there are over a dozen stained glass windows that are made up of literally thousands of individual colored pieces of glass. Part
of the restoration required us to take those down bring them to the studio and Larry Rebekki he is working on that for us. As you can see being able to catalog exactly the location of colors of glass is as important as we go through the lighting process to make sure when we put it back together it creates that wonderful pattern that was there. Throughout the building there are a number of fleur de lis pattern elements that replicate themselves not only in the windows but in the tiles flanking the fireplaces. It's truly an amazing project.

Judy.: Incredible it's huge. That's a huge undertaking. Let's talk a little bit about the new foundation and its relationship with the UVM alumni association.

Alan.: The alumni association is a part of the foundation and I think it's a tremendous advantage to the alumni association that it's allowed us to raise our visibility as the entry of point for alums to reconnect with the university. We've done a survey a number of years ago that showed that 8 out of 10 graduates come back to the city of Burlington only three of those 8 step foot on the UVM campus. This home is really going to create that reengagement point for folks. That's critically important for the foundation has focused on the philanthropic enterprise for us to build and cultivate those relationships.

Judy.: Penrose the alumni association obviously is important to get people back and connected. What kinds of events do you foresee happening in the house and some of the things the house will be used for.

Penrose.: The house will be used not only for alums this but also for the community at large. First about Alums an opportunity to come back and relax or attend an event. They will have first dibs on scheduling the house for events. I live and work in the community and there's a huge challenge in finding the midsize venue for events that's attractive and has character. This will really bring a very important resource to the community for weddings bar mitzvahs receptions and probably also cultural and intellectual events as well.

Judy.: We're almost out of time but can you tell people how to find out more about UVM alums and the alumni house?

Alan.: Yes all of this and the progress that we're making with the house lives on our website alumni.uvm.edu I encourage folks to go there. There's a virtual tour where you can do a walkthrough of the building. The major focus of our work has been on the exterior of the property so there'll be a lot of photos from that. As we continue to work on the interior will be sure to put those of there as well.

Judy.: Also any interest in the younger generation kids they are freshman now that are thinking about going to UVM and getting that nugget of information to them about the alumni association and what they will have after they graduate?

Alan.: Absolutely that embodies the lifelong relationship that we're trying to cultivate and we're contemplating things like beginning and ending at mission tours with the alumni house to enforce the fact that it is a lifelong relationship that those students are having with the university when they start in as freshmen.

Judy.: Penrose any quick comment for folks out there who have not been back?
Penrose.: Come back. The campus has never looked better. Educate yourself to all the fabulous educational offerings. It's been wonderful to watch the maturation of an already very very strong institution. Come home.

Judy.: Excellent, thank you both for joining me today. I can't wait to see the house when it's done. That's our program for today; I'm Judy Simpson. We will see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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