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# HOMES

## MORTGAGE RATES

The average interest rate on 30-year fixed-rate mortgages raised to 6.03 percent last week.

THE PLAIN DEALER

## FULL HOUSE

# Restoration gives Ohio City's old McGuffey School new purpose

**T**hirteen months ago, the empty brick McGuffey School on West 29th Street was a little scary. No, make that a lot scary.



Susan Condon Love

The 1909 school building — built as an annex to a long-gone 1861 structure — had been decaying for decades and empty for years. Bathroom fixtures lay smashed, windows were paneless frames, and paint-chip stalactites hung from ceilings and crevices. The old boiler room was “take-a-misstep-and-you’ll-die” scary.

In every old classroom, hallway and office throughout the building’s three stories, the stale air gripped visitors in a bone-chilling hug.

It’s amazing what \$2.8 million and a vision will do for an old building.

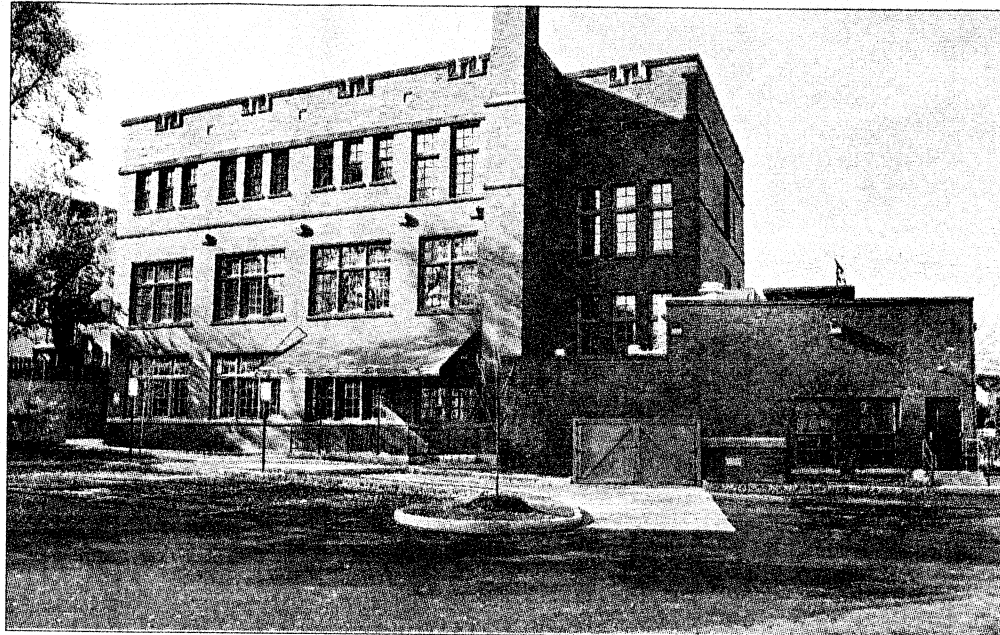
Welcome to the restored

McGuffey School, home — starting Dec. 1 — to the Covenant, an adolescent chemical-dependency treatment and prevention center.

All the renovations are done and historically correct. The 100 six-pane-atop-12-pane windows were repaired

at a cost of \$150,000. Slate chalkboards were cleaned up. Cloakrooms, still with the little holes for coat hooks, are now closets — albeit ones with veeeery low, original door handles that once accommodated little students.

Original wood-plank floors gleam. New silver light fixtures with cloudy glass domes hang in freshly painted hallways. All the doors work, bathrooms sparkle, and the old auditorium is now a light-filled gymnasium (five windows were “unbricked”), with a ceiling 7 feet higher than the original to accommodate basket-



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Thirteen months and \$2.8 million in renovations later, the old McGuffey School in Ohio City is ready for the Covenant, an adolescent chemical dependency treatment and prevention center.

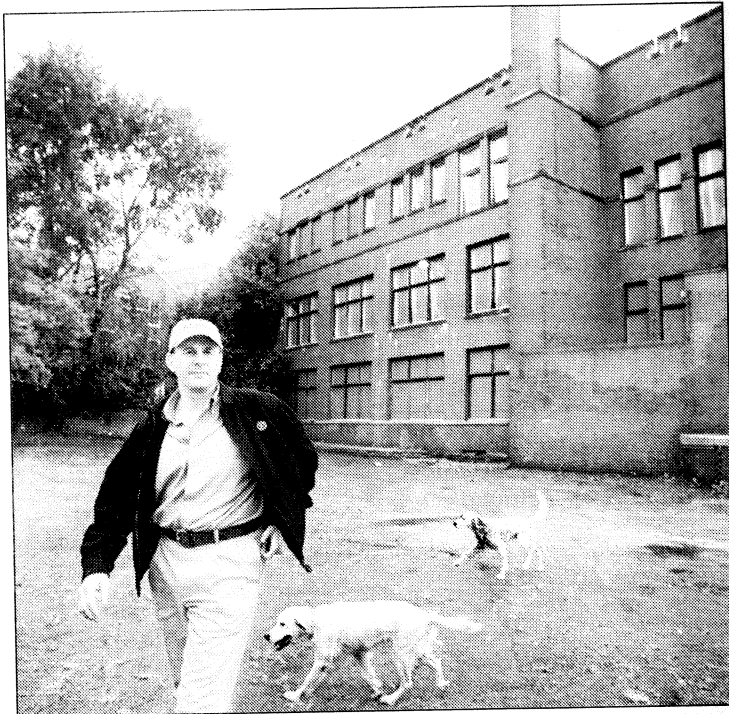
ball games.

The boiler room has a new floor and is now a state-of-the-art kitchen and lunchroom, complete with a skylight where the huge boiler venting once rose to the roof.

The restoration was handled by Michael Chesler, managing director of Second Generation Properties. The company specializes in buying distressed historic commercial buildings and updating and adapting them for current needs.

Chesler bought the 25,000-square-foot Ohio City building at a sheriff’s auction for \$112,000 in 2000. At the time of the purchase, he knew he was going to restore it for the Covenant. The Covenant raised most of the money for the restoration through grants and donations.

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**Michael Chesler, managing director of Second Generation Properties, bought the old McGuffey School building at a sheriff's sale in 2000. It is shown here before the restoration.**

## FULL HOUSE

FROM E1

### Restoration gives school new purpose

"You would not have believed it," said Chesler, standing in the gymnasium on a rare sunny late November day. "I didn't show anyone what it was like. You walked in, and every single room was filled with garbage."

It took 15 men two weeks to clear out the rooms and hallways of the rotting food and other unmentionables. "We filled 14 of those 40-yard dumpsters," said Chesler.

During our recent tour, he continued walking through the building, showing off the changes while mentally preparing for the official rededication. Ohio first lady Hope Taft was due the next day for a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"I keep thinking what I'm going to say," said Chesler, shaking his head. He paused to show off the view of the Cleveland skyline through one of the tall windows. He was now in what will be the office of Covenant executive director Richard Piazza.

"It turned out nice," said Chesler of the restoration. "It turned out right. It's got a good feel."

He looked out the window again.

"People will ask me if I feel a sense of accomplishment. It's not that," he said. "It's really a sense of orientation. You are preserving the past for the future."

"You know how you can drive out to the suburbs and you come to a mall or an area of stores. You look, and you really don't know where you are. You could be anywhere. You are disoriented. [Restoration] orients you to the community and to the past."

All this past week, workers busily brought in work stations, tables and chairs to be used in the small and large group counseling sessions.

Computers and telephones were next to be installed, completing the building's introduction to 2002.

Chesler, meanwhile, is already looking to the future. He's planning a restoration of the Van Rooy Coffee Co. building that overlooks downtown from the Shoreway.

"You should see the views from those windows," he said. "Wow."

Life goes on. And so does the restoration work in Cleveland's old neighborhoods.

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