



Building San Antonio: A shout-out to the volunteers preserving historic homes

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As National Preservation Month comes to a close, it is important to highlight the grassroots preservation efforts that are helping to preserve our local community.

Under the direction of the city's Historic Preservation Officer, [Shanon Peterson](#), and the [University of Texas at San Antonio College of Architecture Senior Lecturer Sue Ann Pemberton](#) a residential transformation in the near East Side historic district of Dignowity Hill has provided a true catalyst for historic neighborhood home rehabilitation. In the span of just four weekends in November and in March and April, more than 25 homes in the historic district were granted a new lease on life.

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A team of volunteers that included more than 250 [UTSA College of Architecture](#) students, local contractors and staff from the [city Office of Historic Preservation](#) have jump-started S.T.A.R. (Students Together Achieving Revitalization), a pilot program coordinated through outreach by the Office of Historic Preservation. It is slowly becoming a genuine hands-on laboratory for students by offering them the opportunity to gain applicable skills and by introducing these future architects to historic preservation — all while assisting homeowners with much needed help on the often emotionally and financially dreaded task of home rehabilitation.

The effort to simultaneously work on 12-13 different homes over each of four weekends required a massive coordination of support and resources, whether obtaining the appropriate type of tools for the tasks at hand, facilitating lunch delivery for all the volunteers or finding generous sponsors. The many organizations who supported this effort allowed the S.T.A.R. program to be managed entirely on donations.

While each of the homes may have had a different rehabilitation focus, the before-and-after difference has had a significant impact on the neighborhood. The volunteer group at each house worked on stripping paint and repainting, removing and reconstructing windows, repairing siding and cleaning up the site of overgrown foliage.

One contractor group even made the extraordinary effort to level the foundation of an entire house.

The program has several benefits. It provided a transformation for the students, who appreciated the opportunity of their 'service learning' project. It changed both the look of each

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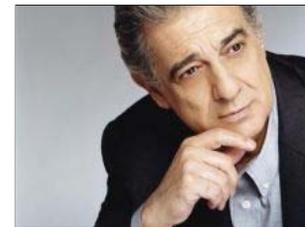
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structure and the upped the aesthetic contribution to its neighborhood street. It helped inspire a new-found impetus in owners to continue the rehabilitation effort, has encouraged the participation of other neighbors.

STAR, with its volunteer approach, is one path to inner-city rehabilitation, but one that can make a big difference toward addressing the needs of many inner-city neighborhoods. The ongoing commitment to local preservation will include another segment of the S.T.A.R. program next spring.

In an effort to assist homeowners throughout the city with the process of rehabilitation, the Office of Historic Preservation, in partnership with the [Neighborhood Services Department](#), has recently announced new programs to assist low to moderate-income historic property owners. The programs offer a combination of loans and grants, and are designed to encourage the preservation and restoration of local historic homes.

For a list of list of eligibility requirements and additional information, contact the Office of Historic Preservation at 210-215-9274.

Christine Viña, AIA, is an architect and urban planner and serves as co-chair of the AIA San Antonio Editorial Board Committee.



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