

An INTERVIEW with LOU ANN WELSH
about her vintage house at 1202 E. Mishawaka Avenue
for which she and her family received the 2013 Heritage Home Award.

How long have you lived in this house?

We moved in Labor Day weekend 1995, 18 years ago.

What made you choose it?

It was old (1927) and unique. We looked at many houses in Knollwood/Granger, the Twyckenham area, Blair Hills, new and old construction alike, but none of them felt the way this one did when we walked in the front door! I am a jogger and loved the idea of living so close to all the parks. From our house to the Logan Street Bridge and back is a great run, walk or bike ride that takes you through four parks.

Do you know anything about the architect, builder and/or past owners? Yes, we had the Diltz brothers here two summers ago -- seven children lived in this house and they almost destroyed it on several occasions! They caught a bedroom on fire in 1959 or 1960 and that is why the house no longer has a green tile roof. One child fell out of a tree and had to live in the sunroom for six months in a hospital bed. They broke a very large aquarium and it flooded the kitchen and basement. And that's what they *told* us!

We were told the builder built it as a spec house. He lived across from Eberhart golf course. The Diltz brothers said a doctor was the first owner and sold it very cheap after the stock market crash to the people (possibly a Gates family member) who got married here. We were also told the second owner bought the lot behind the house in order to have enough room for the wedding ceremony they planned. Billy Graham was supposed to have preformed that ceremony. We have not been able to confirm it.

I had a visit from the youngest Firmani son in 2000 when he was back for a class reunion. His family moved in during the early 1960s. They were the fourth owners. He took pictures of the changes we made to show his mom who at the time lived with him in Washington State.

A young couple bought it when Bessie Firmani moved. They lived here less than a year and then we bought it. Everyone we have met who lived in or around the house can't say enough good things about it and how much they enjoyed living here or playing in the yard. It seems as though it has been a loved family home for many people over the years.

What is your favorite feature about the home?

Probably the color of the brick and the arched doorways on the interior. The doors have unique door handles. The double fireplace is lovely and the open first floor makes it feel larger than it is. The back yard is large for the city. I have tried to keep the original flower beds in the back and many of the bushes around the perimeter are believed to be original. The patio was supposed to have been added for the original wedding performed here and we couldn't live without it. The yard is very beautiful and private despite having Mishawaka Ave. just to the south.

Has the house offered you any surprises over the years?

Only some old newspaper used as a shim during the first kitchen remodel. It was dated Oct. 1947 -- that is the same year my father was born.

Any special story about your time in it? Any strong memories to share?

We had our wedding reception here on Feb. 3, 1996. Both of our daughters have grown up here. This is where we have grown our family. Everything we have done as a couple and family has happened with this house. I love it and I am pretty sure the rest of the group loves it, too!

What project in the house are you the proudest of?

The kitchen. We have a friend Mary who lives down the street. She lives in her grandparents' home. We tried to duplicate the cupboards in her original kitchen because her house is similar to ours, only two years newer. They turned out great! We also kept the stainless steel countertop and sink which we think were added the first time the kitchen was remodeled in 1947. The kitchen is small, but quite efficient. *(Editor: The Mary she mentioned is Mary Watt, who lives in a local landmark house around the corner on Prospect Drive. Lou Ann said when her oldest daughter was learning to count, she'd count the paving stones of the front walk from the street to Mary's door step.)*

Any future projects planned?

Painting, more landscaping, new fencing... there is always something with an old house! However, we would never do anything to change the original architecture. Our oldest daughter would like to turn the old coal room into a Hobbit hole... teenagers!

How do you feel about your neighborhood?

It is very nice. Most houses have unique architecture. No cookie-cutter homes here. Most people do a great job of keeping their yards and homes in good repair. We appreciate that our neighbors are patient with us. Each spring the bushes bloom around Memorial Day. I won't let my husband trim them until they have finished blooming! They usually remind us nicely that it is important to be able to see in order to drive down the alley safely!

Please add anything else you'd like us to know.

We have an old tree in the back yard which unfortunately has been topped. It is not in the best of shape, but because of that it has many hollow areas. Every spring, we have a mother squirrel build a nest in a hollow that is right at window level at the top of our stairs. Our family has witnessed many babies' first walks out of the nest. To our dog's chagrin, we spoil them with nuts, seeds and corn. We will probably have to remove the tree very soon and I will really miss having that bird's eye view of nature. ::

Gathered and edited by
Cliff Zenor
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