

North Carolina's Eastern Living

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ROSE HAVEN



STORY BY **BEN DECK**

A project from the heart to bring back a part of Washington's history while providing a safe place for struggling veterans with substance abuse.



Robert Greene Sands, CEO of the Pamlico Rose Institute for Sustainable Communities, is pictured with the Rose Haven House. **Opposite:** Sands is pointing out the roof structure that needs to be renovated. **Below:** Volunteers rip out old kitchen cabinets.



When David Steckel and Robert Greene Sands contemplated what to do with a dilapidated house on Third Street in Washington, N.C., their shared military background led them toward an innovative plan.

They dubbed the house Rose Haven, and after purchasing it in 2017, they set about renovating it to provide a reintegration home for female veterans recovering from substance abuse. Steckel, the project engineer, is recently retired from the Air Force, where he was a test range engineer and environmental manager. He also has extensive experience in Afghanistan, where he was deployed. Sands, CEO of the organization, is an anthropologist who has worked for the Air Force and the



Defense Intelligence Agency. Sands developed training programs to teach service members about the cultures of other countries when those service members were deploying overseas.

But the project is about more than creating a transitional home. It's about bringing back a historic structure and a part of Washington's diverse history. Built in the late 1800s, the house at 219 East Third Street is a farmhouse style two-story wood structure.

"The house was initially owned by a mixed-race person," Sands said. "(Steckel and I) thought that was pretty cool. Not a lot has been written about Washington's African-American past."

Steckel and Sands formed the Pamlico Rose Institute for Sustainable Communities, a nonprofit focused on building strong communities and preserving history. Rose Haven, the effort to rehabilitate the Third Street house in Washington, is an initiative of the institute.

Sands, who is also running for Washington City Council, said the house is a testament to the history and strength of minority communities and small business in Washington. At times, a laundry and a blacksmith service have been operated out of the structure. The house now sits on a busy thoroughfare in the Washington downtown historic district, and renovating it hopefully spur additional renewal in the area, Sands said.

The house also will provide a venue for



Volunteers work to rip out the old so the soon to be reintegration home can be occupied by female veterans in need.



a more personal sort of rehabilitation. Both Steckel and Sands witnessed the stresses service members face during deployment. They also became familiar with another fact of military life: Female veterans experience the same negative impacts related to their military service as males, but also different kind of impacts than their male counterparts, according to the organization's Website. Female veterans experience greater stress during their term of service rooted in a military culture still not comfortable with female service.

Pamlico Rose will develop a program of social resilience to promote a safe harbor for its residents that will include community-based efforts to help with their transition into community living, according to the organization Website. If successful, the effort won't stop there, though.

"We always want to keep the house as a sign of what we're doing," Sands said. "If it's successful we can export it to other communities. You never want to do something just once if it's successful."

The house has been gutted, and renovation work is under way. Sands estimates the work will cost an additional \$100,000, and the organization is raising funds. It may look like a far-off dream, but the goal is to have the house open in 2018.

"If you ask us, it's in the going-to-be stage," Sands said.



Ben Deck is a freelance writer and regular contributor to Eastern Living magazine.