

Restoring the Green House

THE HITCHCOCK WOODS FOUNDATION HAS A NEW HOME

By Pam Gleason

This spring, the Hitchcock Woods Foundation gained a new office and a more visible presence in the community. The new office is in the Green House, a cottage near the South Boundary entrance of the Hitchcock Woods. Built in the 1920s, the Green House was once home to the families that helped care for the Woods. Today, with a fresh renovation and a traditional look, the Green House accommodates the offices of Executive Director Doug Rabold and Administrator Chris Reichel. There is also a foyer and a comfortable conference room where the Trustees can hold their board meetings. The building also serves as a base of operations for the woodsmen.

The Foundation, established in 1939, has never before had its own home. In the past, Board of Trustee meetings were held at the home or the office of the Chairman. Six years ago, when the Foundation hired an administrator for the first time, Courtney Conger of The Carolina Real Estate Company generously offered the use of offices in her building. Over the last few years, however, as more demands have been placed upon the Woods and the challenges of preserving it have grown, the Trustees realized that the Foundation needed to have its own space and its own identity.

“The Hitchcock Woods Foundation has always fought with a public perception of the Woods being owned by the City of Aiken rather than being private land owned by a private foundation,” says Trustee Randy Wolcott, who was one of the driving forces behind the restoration of the Green House.

“The Board decided that one of the main things we needed to do was to make our identity more secure.

Our thoughts were that we should have an edifice so people could see that we are an entity,” Randy continues.

The Hitchcock Woods Foundation already owned the Green House, which had been part of the estate of Dolly Bostwick. For several years the Foundation had leased it, free of charge, to the Aiken Department Public Safety. A number of different officers and their families lived in the house over the years. As an office, the Green House was a natural choice. Not only was it about the right size, it was also ideally located to emphasize the Foundation’s connection to the Hitchcock Woods itself.

Like many houses of its era in Aiken, the Green House was later covered with aluminum siding. Its beautiful heart pine floors were hidden under linoleum and its heart pine bead-board walls concealed by artificial wood paneling. In addition, there was some termite damage to the foundation that needed to be repaired and the interior needed to be remodeled to accommodate the offices and the conference room.

The renovation job went to Old School Construction. Work started in the spring of 2006. The entire renovation was done with an eye toward preserving the traditional look of the house, while at the same time incorporating modern conveniences and the best new materials. The aluminum siding came off. Workmen repaired the foundation and put in new wiring and insulation. Energy-efficient glazed windows replaced the aluminum storm windows that had been sitting in the original wooden frames. Linoleum was stripped from floors and paneling pulled from the walls, restoring the interior to its

original beauty. In the conference room, where the floor was damaged beyond repair, Old School Construction brought in resawn and remilled antique heart pine floors that had been salvaged from an old mill.

“The walls in the conference room needed to be replaced, too,” says Randy. “They had been doing some renovations at the old Fulmer barn (now the Stable on the Woods) and they had torn down some walls. I took the discarded boards and stored them in my barn. We remilled and refinished them and now they are board and batten paneling in the conference room. It’s a nice connection to the past to know that the paneling is made of old wood that has been in the Woods for a hundred years.”

The renovation was completed this winter and the offices were formally moved in early March. The Trustees and employees of the Hitchcock Woods Foundation are universally thrilled with their new space.

“It’s just the most exciting thing that we could possibly imagine to have our own office,” says Chairman of the Hitchcock Woods Foundation Gail King. “We’ve gone from having nothing to having an administrator, an executive director, a Woods superintendent, and now we have our own office. All of us feel that we have done something good here. The Green House went from looking sad and neglected to this happy cheerful place. Now the building is just smiling.”

In order to continue to meet the challenges of the

twenty-first century, the Foundation has plans for another building near the South Boundary entrance. This will be a Woods Maintenance Complex, where the Woods crew will store all of their tractors and equipment. There are also plans for an endowment campaign. Throughout its 68 years of existence, the



Foundation has not had an endowment. All funds to maintain the Woods had to be raised through private donation or, more often, from the Trustees themselves. With an endowment, the Hitchcock Woods Foundation will be able to make plans for the future and continue to offer the citizens of Aiken the use of the Woods for many years to come. 🌲