



New house, new settlers: Baylor grads are first to live in Good Neighbor house

September 03 05:00
2014

by Web Editor

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Reporter

A 19th-century movement is coming to life in Waco.

Good Neighbor Settlement House, a non-profit organization founded by Dr. Laine Scales, associate dean for graduate and professional studies at Baylor, put down roots in 2012 in the Sanger Heights neighborhood west of campus in hopes of creating a community meeting place where a condemned home once stood.

Now, with two Baylor graduate students as the home's first settlers, that mission is being fulfilled.

Chesapeake, Va., graduate student Katie Robbins is one of two residents in what is now Waco's only settlement house.

"This is kind of a renaissance," Robbins said.

Robbins is a doctoral student in the higher education and leadership studies program. She said she was introduced to the organization through Scales.

Scales said she was inspired by the famous Hull House, a 19th-century settlement house run by activist Jane Addams in Illinois that helped to foster a sense of a mutually-benefitting community.



This is the Good Neighbor Settlement House, where Waco citizens are encouraged to go to for a meeting place.
Sara Katherine Johnson | Lariat Reporter

Good Neighbor is motivated by their Christian faith according to their mission statement. Scales said their goal was to create a space conducive for different ages, classes and races of people to learn from each other.

"The really cool thing about this organization is being on mission in our own community," Robbins said.

The aspect of settlement houses that separates them from other non-profits is that settlers, residents associated with the organization, live in the neighborhoods that they are serving. There is no clear end to a workday for Good Neighbor settlers. Robbins said residents of the house are direct conduits between the rest of the organization and the neighbors they wish to serve.

Chateaugay, N.Y. graduate student Hannah Hanover, the other settler-resident of the green and white house behind the main Good Neighbor house, said she learned about the organization through Dustin Morrow, Good Neighbor board member and fellow graduate student.

"I basically see myself as neighbor and PR representative," Hanover said.

Both Robbins and Hanover said they were attracted to the Good Neighbor program for its service-based model.

The main house still requires costly repairs before it can be used for anything, Robbins said. Eventually, there will be settlers living in the upstairs of the main house in addition to the green and white one out back. However, nothing on the construction to-do list is holding Good Neighbor back.

While renovations continue, Good Neighbor will partner with other community nonprofits, Hanover said. The settlers said they will specifically work on fostering relationships that will later lead to people wanting to come to the house.

"Neighborliness is worth cultivating," Hanover said, describing the organization's overall goal.

Once renovations have been completed, the house will be used for many things. Settlers will lead programs for adults and children. Community members will be able to use the space for celebrations, like wedding anniversary parties. The house could also be used for neighborhood board meetings, Scales said.

"You can't turn the Titanic on the dime," Robbins said. "I think, personally, it's going to be a great lesson in humility. Not necessarily that I'm overly prideful, sometimes I have a really difficult time asking for help. I think it's going to be really character-forming for me, too."

Robbins said increasing Good Neighbor's visibility within the larger Waco community is also a goal.

Hanover said she hopes by the end of her one-year lease she will be able to walk the block, comfortably chatting away with new friends she has made.

More information about Good Neighbor and volunteer opportunities can be found at goodneighborwaco.org.

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