

'Cool' school cost owner \$1

Guernsey man wants to live in school building

By Dave Gosch
Gazette staff writer

GUERNSEY — Imagine making your first real-estate purchase and only paying a buck for it.

That happened to Scott Steffen, who bought the old Guernsey school at a public auction in May. Steffen would like to fix up the structure, put apartments in it and eventually live there.

"I always wanted it. I thought it would be cool to buy," he said. Steffen, 25, graduated from the University of Iowa last December with a physical science degree and works at his father's siding company in Guernsey.

The school was built in 1917 at a cost of \$65,000. It became a K-6 school in 1960 when Guernsey joined the BGM district. The school closed in 1964 when all classes were moved to Brooklyn, said Steffen.

BGM sold the building to Charlie Jacobs in 1973. Jacobs used it for his antiques business and held auctions in the gymnasium.

Steffen said it was sold to Mike and Sandy Hammes in the early 1980s and Jacobs eventually regained possession of it. Eventually the property reverted to Poweshiek County in lieu of taxes, which is how Steffen bought it for \$1.

The school stood vacant for five years before Steffen bought it. Vandals took their toll on the building during that time.

Windows are busted out, graffiti is spray-painted on the interior and debris is strewn about the building.

STEFFEN REMEMBERS when he was a boy and how he used to sneak into the school with his friends.

"There used to be bats in the chimney and we'd listen to them. They'd get ready to go and get worked up and they'd come out of the chimney like smoke," said Steffen.

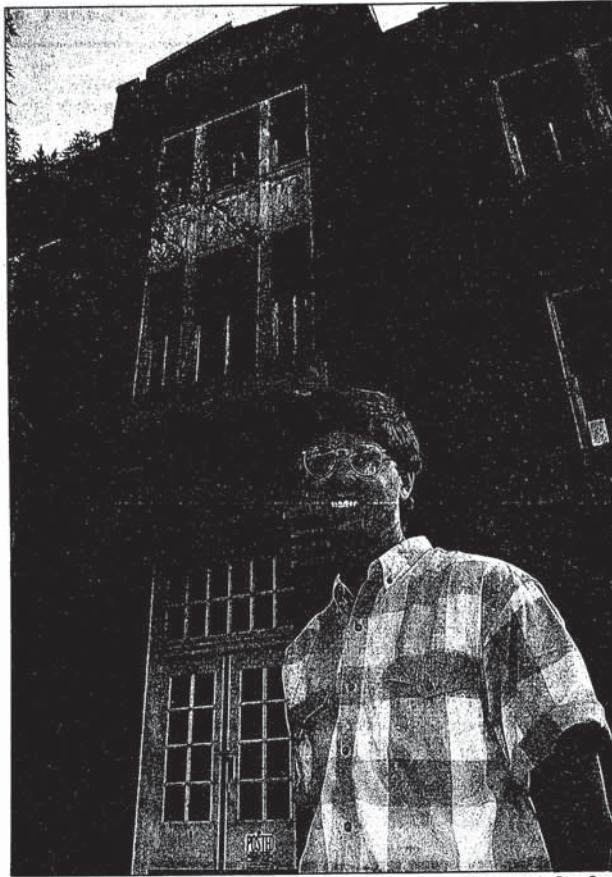
"We never vandalized it. We thought it was neat."

And he still thinks so. Eventually he'd like to make the entire top floor into his apartment.

If he does, the spacious study hall would make a living room with a view. Gaze outside the windows and you can see the gently rolling hills surrounding town.

He also would like to make the old biology lab — with its wood-framed cabinets still in place — into a kitchen.

In the meantime, Steffen is just trying to gather donated materials to help in his renovation of the building.



Gazette photo by Dave Gosch

Scott Steffen bought the old Guernsey school for \$1 at a public auction in May. Steffen wants to fix up the structure, built in 1917.

"It's such a big building. It's solid," said Steffen. "Everything in here is concrete. At the time, it must have been a pretty advanced building."

The building has an elaborate steam heating system for the winter and a ventilation system to cool it in the summer, he said. "Everything in this building was planned out," he added.

Since the boiler blew up several years ago, Steffen would use conventional furnaces to heat the building.

There is precedent for it being a dwelling because people lived there when Jacobs owned it.

Steffen's father, Roger, was against the idea of his son buying the building. But now he doesn't seem to

think it's so bad because the school makes a nice place for him to store materials for his business, S&S Siding.

As for his son, he's uncertain whether the school will make the perfect bachelor pad.

"That's a great way to pick up women," he said sarcastically. "Say you live in a school."

Mount Mercy dinner to honor Felds

Mount Mercy College will honor its president, Dr. Thomas R. Feld, and his wife, Dr. Donna J. Feld, for 15 years of service at a celebration dinner Thursday at Collins Plaza Hotel.

Proceeds from the dinner will go toward the Drs. Thomas and Donna Feld Endowed Scholarship at Mount Mercy. More than 350 guests are expected to attend. Emmett J. Scherrman, chairman of the Mount Mercy board of trustees, will serve as master of ceremonies.

Reflections on the past 15 years will be offered by William P. Whipple, president of the Hall Foundation; Martin L. Andreas, corporate vice president of marketing for Archer Daniels Midland and a member of the Mount Mercy board of trustees; Dr. J. Fred Young, president of Elon College in North Carolina; and Sister Mary Augustine Roth, chairman of the Mercy Medical Center board of trustees and professor of English and public relations at Mount Mercy.

Archbishop Daniel W. Kucera will make a special presentation, and Vincent J. Noce Jr., president of Roush Products Inc. and vice chairman of the Mount Mercy board of trustees, will make an endowment announcement.

Reception co-sponsors are Bradley & Riley and Den Hartog & Hogan.

During Dr. Thomas Feld's first five years at Mount Mercy, Donnelly chemistry area was developed, Warde Hall was renovated and the New Futures campaign exceeded its goal. In 1982, Mount Mercy was granted the maximum 10-year accreditation from North Central Association. From 1982 to 1987, Hennessey Recreation Center was dedicated and the Patterns of Progress campaign exceeded its goal.

Since 1987, Project Access was implemented for minority students.

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