LAEP House Grand Opening

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Logan's Hillcrest neighborhood just northeast of the Utah State University campus has a "new" energy-efficient, accessible, 1940s-vintage addition thanks to donor support and the vision and hard work of administrators, USU Facilities, and faculty and students in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning.

The structure at 1305 E. 700 N. has lived through various iterations both public and private since it was constructed as a family home. For the past several semesters it has been the focus of Associate Professor Phil Waite's Field Studio class and will now serve as an extended-stay guest cottage for visiting scholars and designers in the department.

"The home has a beautiful mountain view, in a quiet area that is close to campus, and so despite the uphill challenges the structure and landscape presented we decided this was the time to transform it," said LAEP Department Head and Professor Sean Michael. "The timing of the project worked very well for our studio class. Landscape architecture is a problem-solving discipline and this gave students and faculty valuable experiences."

Michael said making the home and landscape ADA compliant to provide access for people with disabilities was an important learning opportunity for students. There were also times when design compromises were made, just as they are in the profession, and students saw where some decisions went wrong. For example, at a gathering to celebrate some earlier milestones in the home's redesign and construction, the team discovered that the gravel that they had specified, shoveled and spread would have to be replaced when a guest in a powered wheelchair got stuck in the yard.

"The students have worked extremely hard and have a great sense of pride in the project's completion," Michael said.

The house underwent a transformation both inside and out. Michael explained that one of the many goals for the project is to demonstrate ways in which an old structure can be improved, made accessible, energy efficient and still fit visually with its neighborhood. Interior spaces were reimagined and reconfigured to create a kitchen, living room, bedroom, laundry room/office and bathroom on the main floor.

The front yard showcases a sculpture by recent landscape architecture graduate Nick Decker, planters that feature beautifully textured water-wise plants and a welcoming entrance whether approached by stairs or ramp. Michael views the home as an exciting "new face or front door to the east end of the campus."

Among the less obvious, but very important, changes to the house were the addition of insulation and reflective material in the attic that minimize heat trapped there on hot days. Walls were reframed inside the existing studs, which essentially made the exterior walls a shell for the interior and allowed space for insulation. Windows were replaced with energy-efficient ones, but retained the style of the original windows.

Other features of the renovated house and landscape include five solar panels donated by Gardner Energy, each of which generates 240 watts of electricity. When the panels produce more than the home is using, electricity flows back to the local power grid. Indoor lighting was replaced with LED fixtures and plumbing fixtures are water-efficient.

Beyond the many learning opportunities the project provided, the finished home is a comfortable and functional temporary home for visiting scholars and practitioners.

"The vision for the space is to provide a visiting scholar's cottage for colleagues at the apogee of their careers, and who want to impact the next generation of landscape architects and planners," Michael said. "Logan provides a tremendous backdrop for someone to come experience the beauty and outdoor opportunities in this area while engaging with students."

Associate Professor Dave Anderson, who oversaw the home's redesign and renovation, said the support from donors, including many who offered reduced prices for materials, was essential to getting the project done. He looks forward to the home being an important asset to the department and students for many years to come.

"We are removed geographically from the centers of the design world and we all benefit from the infusion of ideas and energy that come with a visiting professional practitioner," Anderson said. "The home makes this a more attractive opportunity because we can offer them a beautiful, comfortable place for an extended stay and
they don’t have to maintain multiple homes while they are working with us.”

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