

St. James Hotel in Cuba could get new lease on life

By KIP DOYLE
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CUBA — Facing demolition due to deteriorating conditions, the St. James Hotel has a new owner and new hope.

Jim Swift, who grew up in Cuba and now runs a successful construction company in Moscow, Idaho, is in the final stages of gaining ownership of the building from Dennis and Dianne Peterson, who have run the bar at the St. James for the past 10 years.

The building, which was built in 1835, served as a public boarding house for decades. The bar was attached before the turn of the 20th century.

After observing the conditions of the building, Mr. Swift said the original three-story boarding building is still structurally sound, but the floor of the bar area is rotting.

"Based on what I have seen going through that (the bar), it needs to all come down or it will fall down," Mr. Swift said.

Mr. Swift plans to renovate the boarding rooms into high-quality condominiums, ideal for young families entering the home market.

"I hope to build two side-by-side living units which I would like to market as condos.



KIP DOYLE/Olean Times Herald

With a new owner, the St. James Hotel on East Main Street is facing reconstruction. The upper stories of the hotel will be turned into condominiums.

Otherwise, I have two apartments that can be rented out," he said. "We are trying to think outside of the box to give people a home ownership option and to preserve the building," Mr. Swift said.

Mr. Peterson said the sale will help save the building. Although the future of the bar is uncertain, Mr. Peterson said his patrons understand that the bar business "has its ups and downs".

As part of the agreement, Mr. Swift will allow the Petersons to continue running

public parking.

Mr. Swift's history with the St. James Hotel goes back to the 1970s when he worked there as a bartender. Already the owner of the Maple Lane Campground and RV Park in Cuba, Mr. Swift said he feels a sense of duty to the building and to the town.

The Cuba Friends of Architecture, who are in the process of repairing and reopening the Palmer Opera House, have been a source of inspiration and council for the St. James project, Mr. Swift said.

"I became interested in preservation after following the work of the Cuba Friends of Architecture," he said. "It's

the bar for another two years.

Work on will begin on the bar area at this point, and Mr. Swift said he will give the Petersons an opportunity to restart business once the repairs are completed.

The St. James Hotel is surrounded a large parking area which Mr. Swift plans to pave and expand for more off-street

like having a support group."

Mr. Swift said, "It's my bid for the town of Cuba. My dad (Andy Swift) was the highway superintendent 35 years ago. I think he would think it was a good thing to do."