

## **Silvercrest: An Architectural Treasure in the Hills of New Albany**

According to the most recent survey of New Albany's Historic architecture, the magnificent buildings that formerly served as the campus of the Silvercrest Hospital are some of the finest structures in the city limits. With the recent closing of the Silver Crest Children's Development Center at the site in 2006, the Silvercrest structures are ripe for private development.

**"Among the Finest Examples of the Style in New Albany"**



The original buildings at Silvercrest include a large hospital and its accessory buildings, which are tremendous examples of Art Moderne and Art Deco architecture. The site is currently eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and is a potential Local Historic District. In addition to its architectural brilliance, the site remains true to its original description in the hospital prospectus as "surrounded with the natural beauty for which Southern Indiana has long been famous...with the myriad lights of the metropolitan area of Louisville...alive with scenic beauty."

### **The History of the Silvercrest Hospital in New Albany**

By 1917, the Floyd County Tuberculosis Association had been established in an effort toward prevention of tuberculosis, and to the establishment of a tuberculosis sanatorium in this part of the state. The tuberculosis belt in the United States was known as the "black belt," and included much of Kentucky and Tennessee, southern Illinois, Ohio and Indiana, of which New Albany was a part.

In 1924, the FCTA purchased the old Handy farm on Old Vincennes Road for \$6,500, which included a total of 42 acres, 20 of which were flat, hilltop land. The funds for the hospital were secured by popular subscription from the citizens of New Albany and by city-wide fundraising efforts. Fundraising events included everything from neighborhood skits, as the one given at the Hackett residence at 1732 DePauw Avenue by the neighborhood children charging a 3-cent admission, to a more elaborate pageant produced at Glenwood Park in 1923. This pageant, *The Greatest Gift: A Pageant of Health*, was written for the benefit of the FCTA, had a cast of 1000 members, and was seen by thousands of people from New Albany, Jeffersonville

and Louisville. *Pathé News* shot a movie of the pageant and it played at the Grand Theater the following Sunday. By 1936, fundraising efforts allowed a 20-bed sanatorium to open on the site.

In July 1938, twelve years from the date of purchase of the land, the Indiana General Assembly held a special session to enact a bill locating a site for the Southern Indiana Tuberculosis Hospital.

A New Albany Citizens Committee was immediately formed. Judge John Parris was chairman of the committee which included John A. Cody, Jr.; James Forman; Paul Seabrook; State Senator William B. Janes; State Representative H. Scott Pickens; James Montgomery; U.S. Senator Sherman Minton; J. Irvin Streepey; Dr. John Gentile; Mrs. J. Gardner; Mrs. A. O. Binford and Mrs. Anna E. Sims.

The NACC, along with the New Albany Chamber of Commerce, devised a formal proposal and submitted it to the State. New Albany was not the only community vying for the new state hospital. Twelve other communities representing numerous counties also lobbied the State. In the end, New Albany was awarded the new State tuberculosis hospital in September 1938. Several major factors in the New Albany proposal made it "the logical choice." First, the FCTA agreed to donate the ground of the former sanatorium and farm to the State. In addition, the beautiful scenery; the hilltop, sheltered from the Silver Hills to the west; superior recreational facilities; transportation hub; and the progressive City of New Albany were all determining factors in locating the Southern Indiana Tuberculosis Hospital in the area.

The hospital was a Public Works Administration project and Indianapolis architect August Bohlen was chosen to draw up the plans. Construction began immediately, and by August 1940, the \$1 million, 150-bed hospital received its first patients.

A unique feature of the hospital was that it provided individual rooms for the patients instead of the more widely used ward facilities. Silvercrest included an outpatient clinic with numerous laboratories, surgery rooms, kitchen and laundry facilities, and a dental office on site. The original complex included the main building, a residence built for the superintendent, and several guest houses.

The hospital served a 32-county area and when the facility opened, it was too busy ministering to its 150 patients to take time out for a formal dedication. On May 10, 1941, state and local dignitaries, including Indiana Gov. Henry F. Schricker, gathered at the site for the long-awaited dedication.

By December 1952, five motel-type structures, along with two large residences, were added and dedicated to the medical campus totaling \$275,000.00. Hawkins and Walker, well-known New Albany architects, drew up the plans, and Sheperd and Rogers, also of New Albany, were the contractors.

The State began to phase out operations at Silvercrest on April 1, 1972. The site was used as the Silvercrest Children's Development Center until 2006.

### **Hope for the Future**

The availability of Silvercrest to private development comes at a time of renewed interest in historic preservation and revitalization in New Albany. It is widely anticipated that an appropriate, adaptive reuse can be provided so that future citizens of New Albany will enjoy the architectural splendor and scenic beauty of Silvercrest.