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Updated: 9:49 am | December 4, 2010

## Newport home tour steps back in time

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BY BRENNAN R. KELLY • BKELLY@NKY.COM • DECEMBER 4, 2010

**NEWPORT** - The moment he walked into the 1883 Italianate home on Fourth Street, Mark Ramler knew that behind the drop ceilings, wood-paneled walls and old carpet, there was something special.

"It was a total mess, but I saw this staircase and I said, 'you know, I know what this house can be'," said Ramler, 26, who has spent the last two years restoring the home with the help of his parents.

The family uncovered plaster medallions on the ceilings, transoms over the interior doors and gleaming hardwood floors.

With the work almost done, the home is one of seven houses and a mansion featured on this year's Victorian Christmas Home Tour, which continues today in Newport's East Row Historic District.

The tour, in its 17th year, features Italianate and Queen Anne-style homes dating from 1883 to 1897. Also featured on the tour is the Gen. James Taylor Mansion, which was built in 1815.

Tour Chairwoman Pat Budd worried Saturday that the snow would keep people from this year's tour. Last year, more than 1,500 people toured the homes.

"We try to get different houses every year," Budd said. Sometimes the tour features a finished home that was a work in progress the prior year.

The houses in the East Row Historic District - the second-largest historic district in the state - are on land once owned by Taylor, Newport's founder.

His mansion, called Bellevue, is the first stop on the tour. The mansion was restored in 2005 and is now home to the Gerner and Kearns Law firm.

Some of the other homes on the tour include an 1890 Queen Anne with seven fireplaces, a Tiger wood staircase, and marble countertops salvaged from a building in downtown Cincinnati and another 1883 Italianate with wide-plank hickory floors, a tin ceiling and original trim work.

Several of the homes, including Ramler's, have been converted back to single-family homes after being chopped up into apartments for years.

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Ramler's house had been turned into three apartments with drop ceilings put in over windows and at least 10 layers of wallpaper on top of the plaster walls.

The kitchen is the only room not renovated. Gutted down to the wall, it gives visitors a taste of the work that went into restoring the rest of the home. Ramler plans to add skylights and 6-foot tall cabinets.

Not on the tour, but shown in pictures is a finished room Ramler found in the basement with 1920s linoleum and a caged window.

"We think maybe somebody was bootlegging down there," he said.

Ramler, who just completed his master's in Historic Preservation at the University of Kentucky, spent weekends working on the house with his parents Tom and Sharon Ramler. He now lives there full-time and works overseeing rehabilitations for Model Group in Cincinnati.

"It has just turned out spectacular," Ramler said "uncovering all the layers and the history of it, and refinishing stuff, it's just incredible."



The Enquirer / Brenna R. Kelly

**Mark Ramler, 26, has restored a 1883 Italianate home in Newport's East Row Historic District. His house is featured on the 2010 Victorian Christmas Home Tour Saturday and Sunday in Newport.**

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