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Conservation Society backs talk with funds - Buildings and the people who restore them profit from the organization's grants.

By Kay O'Donnell September 25, 2004 Publication: San Antonio Express-News (TX)

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The roof leaks, the foundation's unstable, the ceiling and floors are partially rotten. Sounds like a job for the wrecking ball. But if you're talking about a 1917 Arts and Crafts bungalow in Southtown, the focus shifts from demolition to preservation.

Preservation efforts, while a noble endeavor, often require time, patience and, most of all, money. That's where the San Antonio Conservation Society can play a part. Since 1994, the society has handed out approximately \$1 million to help fund conservation projects throughout the city. The deadline to apply for 2004 funds is Friday. For more information on the grant process or to download an application form, visit the San Antonio Conservation Society's Web site at www.saconservation.org/programs. "We base our recommendations (of who is awarded a grant) on need," said Barbara Johnson, society president. "We have several people who have applied several times, but we have to make a judgment call on what (project) is most needy." Alan Cash, who is retired from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and lives in an early 20th-century Arts and Crafts bungalow in Southtown, received \$4,800 last year from the Conservation Society to help restore the wraparound front porch on his house. "The Conservation Society likes to zero in on one particular part of a house," said Cash, and in

his case that part was the porch. The porch roof leaked and the floor had rotted, and in general, the area "was in really bad shape," he said. The grant money was used not only to repair the porch, but to help restore it according to its original design. "The wood for the porch was a particular kind of cut so we had to have it specially milled," Cash said. The porch roof was originally suspended by three chains, an Arts and Crafts characteristic, and though the chains do not currently provide the needed support for the roof, they still hang in homage to the design movement. Though Cash received only one grant from the society, other projects have been recognized up to three times. The VFW Hall, Post 76, on Tenth Street, has been awarded three grants totaling about \$20,000. The most recent funding, received in 2003, was \$12,000 to help repair the building's foundation. According to Robert Rios, a past member who helped process the grant, the structure dates to the mid-1860s and is the homestead of the family that founded the Lone Star Brewery. The building has been undergoing a series of repairs and refurbishment after a fire in 1989. "We're going one room at a time," Rios said. With the hall's membership facing a daunting list of repairs, Rios said "the most important thing is to prioritize and take care of the most important items such as foundation and structure, and then you can go back and do the cosmetic work." "We probably would have done all the work, but it would have taken a lot longer (without the society's help)," he said. To ensure that work funded by the society is done correctly, with adherence to any essential historical details or design principles, the organization will assist in selecting project materials and even offer advice on how to approach the project. The award money is not disbursed until the project has been completed and the society's staff architect evaluates the work, Johnson said. Though the restoration of historic structures is a priority of the Conservation Society, the grants are not restricted to this type of work. The awards are given out in three categories: historic structure restoration and rehabilitation, heritage education, and historic research. Grants have been used by those whose tools of choice run to the pen-and-paper variety, such as one distributed in 2002 for a book on area craftspeople. A small group consisting of writer/videographer Barbara Hendricks, coordinator Emily Thuss and photographer Monte Adams received a \$4,850 grant for their work-in-progress, a book titled "The Building Arts - Craftspeople of South Central Texas." "Our purpose is to try to capture, before they're lost, some of the artisans and their techniques," Hendricks said. The subjects of their book are those who do "historical repair work," she said. Though the grant specified that the group deliver audiotapes of all interviews and sample chapters, the trio has gone a bit further by videotaping segments as well. "We've just completed the first four chapters, and that took about one and a half years," Hendricks said, adding that the group is now trying to raise additional funding to complete the book. She said, "Our most distinguished interview so far has been with Johannes Scholze," a wood-carver and furniture designer who has left his mark on several local and regional landmarks. Scholze, born in 1901, is noted as having carved the original seal for San Antonio, "which is now the city seal,"

Hendricks said. The group has also interviewed woodworker John Hall, blacksmith Kurt Pankratz and "stuccoist" Mike Battersby. Hendricks said they hope to interview about 16 other craftspeople in areas such as tile, glass and masonry. "It is really important to encourage these craftspeople" to tell their stories and describe the work that they do, otherwise, in the future, there will be no one to do historical repair work, she said.

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