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Thursday, November 18, 2004

Six Acres of history

College Hill home with ties to Underground Railroad now a B&B

LLÉE SIVITZ | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

I have been to many wonderful bed and breakfasts in our region, but never have I felt it was an *honor* to stay at one. That is how I felt, however, at the newly opened Six Acres Bed & Breakfast in College Hill.

What drew the co-owners, Kristin Kitchen and Laura Long, to renovate this 1860s house on a hill was not their entrepreneurial spirit, but their desire to preserve and share the home's Underground Railroad history.

The family of the home's builder, Elon Strong, were well-known abolitionists in Cincinnati. Kitchen's research uncovered documentation that substantiates that the Strong's house was a safe haven for runaway slaves.

Previously slated for demolition, the structure had been stripped - inside and out - of much of its original trim, staircases, flooring and tiles before being declared a historic home in 1988. Kitchen purchased the house in 2001.

Remodeling all 6,500 square feet has been an ongoing project - hence the unfinished detail here and there.

What I saw, however, was a beautifully restored interior, with 19 rooms painted in deep, stunning colors: forest green, velvet red, royal blue and burnt orange. Oriental rugs are strewn on the tile and hardwood floors.

The five guest bedrooms - two with private baths - are named after the owners' grandmothers and co-workers. The surprisingly large original tubs remain, so even someone of six-foot stature can stretch out for a



Zoom

WHEN YOU GO

The place: Six Acres Bed & Breakfast, 5350 Hamilton Ave., College Hill.

Information: (513) 541-0873; or info@sixacresbb.com, www.sixacresbb.com.

The directions: From downtown, take I-75 North to exit 4 (I-74 West toward Indianapolis). Take 1-74 West to exit 18 (U.S. 27 North/Colerain Ave.). Go left onto Colerain Avenue. Turn right on Virginia Avenue; continue until it dead-ends into Kirby Street; turn left. Turn right on Ashtree Drive. When Ashtree dead-ends into Hamilton Avenue, turn left. Drive half a mile north to Six Acres, on the right and one driveway north of the Hammond North Condominiums.

The tab: \$99-\$139 per night, including breakfast.

Amenities available: Satellite t.v., turn-down service, airport transportation.

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comfortable soak.

I stayed in Grandma Sallie's room, a large, petal pink suite with a king-sized bed and a bathroom the size of a small bedroom.

Breakfast was a wonderful display of hospitality. Although bacon and sausage were offered, I requested vegetarian fare and was served delicious whole wheat pancakes, fresh berry compote, cheesy scrambled eggs and vegetarian sausage in the spacious dining room.

After breakfast, we toured the house and learned about its importance to the Underground Railroad. Kitchen ushered me up the attic stairs to a small, empty room with a 2½-foot doorway and a 6½-foot ceiling, where she believes the slaves were hidden.

In the basement, a tall but dilapidated wooden cabinet with drawers stretched along one wall. Curiously, it was missing an end. I peeked around to see a tight hiding place behind the shallow drawers and felt admiration for the Strongs' bravery.

Kitchen and Long, both African-American, envision this house and its six wooded acres not only as a tranquil stopover but also as an opportunity for outreach to the local community.

"We want to be a cultural, educational, enriching environment as well as a place where you can feel like you are at home," says Long.

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