



News & Record

Chip Sharpe has donated his parents' house to the nonprofit Share-A-Home of Guilford County, along with \$5,000 from him and his wife, Celestine Armenta.

## A house full of memories

Those who sipped Coca-Colas mixed the old way with syrup and carbonated water at Fordham's Drug Store downtown delighted in listening to the man doing the mixing, Charlie Sharpe.



JIM SCHLOSSER

He was, as has been said before, Greensboro's second-most famous soda jerk. Short-story writer William Sydney Porter (O. Henry), as a youth in the 1880s, worked the soda fountain at his uncle's South Elm Street drugstore.

Sharpe wrote, too. His poem, "A Soda Jerk's Prayer," decorated the mirror behind Fordham's 1902 soda fountain.

The store, with an apothecary cup atop the facade, stayed almost unchanged from its opening in 1898, across the railroad tracks on South Elm Street, until its closing in 2002.

Sharpe also published a book, "Poems from

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the Heart of Olde Greensborough."

Porter has memorials, including the O. Henry Hotel. Now honors are coming for Sharpe, who died in 2006 at age 91, and for his equally dynamic wife, the former Elizabeth Apple, who died in 2008 at age 98.

Their son, Chip Sharpe, 64, of Bayside, Calif., has donated his parents' house to the nonprofit Share-A-Home of Guilford County, along with \$5,000 from him and his wife, Celestine Armenta.

Share-A-Home, after receiving suggestions about future uses of the six-room, Craftsman-style cottage with a quarter-acre lot, plans to heed a neighborhood association request.

The property will become the Charlie and Elizabeth Sharpe Memorial House, a neighborhood gathering place. The house will become a permanent reminder of a couple whose life didn't go with the flow.

Charlie Sharpe graduated from Guilford College and attended Duke Divinity School, but preferred to work in the drugstore in south Greensboro.

This left him time for preaching at churches where he was invited and for playing one of his 20 violins or fiddles.

He and Elizabeth Sharpe, who played tennis and basketball at Meredith College, lived from 1955 until about 1999 in the house. It was built in 1925 at Randolph Avenue and Dale Street, just off Martin Luther King Jr. Drive (formerly Asheboro Street).

When the neighborhood changed almost overnight in the early 1960s from mostly white to mostly black, the Sharpes were among the few white residents who remained.

Chip Sharpe, now retired from nonprofit work in northern California, remembers his mother declaring: "I'm from south Greensboro. This is where my heart is, and that's where I'm staying."

Elizabeth Sharpe was the



Courtesy of Chip Sharpe

Elizabeth Sharpe (third from left) played tennis and basketball at Meredith College. She later taught at Gillespie Park school.

neighborhood's surrogate mother. She gathered children, whose mothers were at work, around her on the veranda. After years of book-keeping work, she received a teacher's certificate and taught at the neighborhood school, Gillespie Park. Her husband drew people to the porch, too, with his violin-playing.

The couple didn't own a car until the 1960s. Even then, Charlie continued bicycling the short distance to Fordham's. Before the car, Chip Sharpe remembers riding buses around the city with his dad, who would take out a violin and entertain passengers.

After his parents entered retirement centers, Chip Sharpe rented the house.

Recently, he heard of Share-A-Home, which formerly had two houses near downtown that provided rooms for elderly people. A church needed the houses for expansion.

"Skip wanted to do something to help this neighborhood," says Carolyn Biggerstaff, Share-A-Home's executive director, pointing out that Randolph Avenue has been trying to regain its old charm.

Preservation Greensboro hopes to restore an old house across from the Sharpe home.

Share-A-Home hopes to add to the money from Chip Sharpe with public donations, foundation grants and gifts of construction materials.

Southern Evergreens, which recently restored a

venerable house moved from Blandwood Avenue to Cedar Street, will do the work.

The house has holes in the foundation, lead paint, loose porch boards and a front walk pushed upward by roots of two oak trees. But Skip Crow, a community activist, said Southern Evergreens and others say the structure is solid and can be easily renovated.

The property includes a quaint, weathered shed in the backyard. Crow and Biggerstaff say it will be moved elsewhere in the yard to make room for a 600- or 700-square-foot addition. The room will be for community use, where children could come, say, for computer classes.

Biggerstaff would like to have a backyard community garden with the shed used perhaps as a cannery.

Crow says a now-bare fig tree will be heavy with figs later in the year.

Crow and Biggerstaff hope to obtain for the house a portrait of Sharpe from the closed Fordham Drug Store building.

A plaque will inform people they're entering the Charlie and Elizabeth Sharpe Memorial House.

A plaque excites Chip Sharpe, Crow says.

"Can you think," Crow says, "of anything more exciting than a memorial for your parents that is the house they lived in?"

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