



THE GREEN LAKE FOUNDATION

THE GREEN LAKE FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

“God save the foundation!” (Shakespeare)

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Green Lake Foundation

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Foundation President Rhona Kwiram Answers Questions about the Meridian House

When did the Foundation buy the Meridian House?

In early November 2018. It was formally blessed on Sabbath, November 24, two days after Thanksgiving Day. More than 100 church members were present.

How did the Board act so quickly?

Less than 24 hours after the house came on the market, an offer had been accepted by the seller for more than \$900,000. The property was already under contract with contingencies when we learned about all this a day or so later. A quick decision was necessary if we were going to have any chance to compete for this property.

We were told that other parties were keenly interested and were preparing to submit back-up bids. Your Foundation board firmly and unanimously believed that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and an answer to the prayers of many Green Lake members for decades. The house had not been on the market since 1961. Church members and the church board encouraged us to move forward.

Didn't our church previously own this house?

No, but we originally owned the property directly adjacent to the church. We had to sell that in the 1940s to comply with Conference policy against indebtedness. The congregation has long wanted to acquire the properties on this block in order to carry out our ministries more effectively.

What was the price?

The original bid had been at \$925,000 but we were able to purchase the property for \$801,000. In Seattle's strong real estate market, the board felt that price was both fair and achievable by our congregation. The Green Lake neighborhood is especially desirable because of Green Lake itself, park access, and its location near the University of Washington and central Seattle locations. The house even has a nice view of Green Lake from both the first and second floors.

Church members Don Mehrer and Alvin Kwiram remarked that the Meridian House was “in good shape” and “had good bones.” Could you expand on that?

We acquired a property without structural problems, and many features had been updated recently. Nonetheless, certain upgrades have been made on matters that needed some attention: painting, drywall, furnace work, repair of the sewer line and addressing down-spout drainage issues, refinishing the hardwood floors on the main level, and other items. [Please see page 2 article for details.]

The initial goal was to raise \$650,000 in cash gifts by July 2019 and then acquire a mortgage on the balance. Has this changed?

Some have urged that we try to raise the entire amount (plus renovation costs) and begin to utilize the Meridian House in church ministries immediately. That is a “stretch goal;” but if that could be achieved, it would be well beyond the board's initial expectations. But it would allow us to accelerate and expand ministries.

How has fund-raising gone thus far?

We have achieved a great deal. A leadership gift of \$100,000 from Don and Shirley Mehrer inspired the decision to purchase the house.

The church board made a contribution of \$51,000. In addition, an inspiring matching fund challenge from the Foundation Board has been made for up to \$250,000.

The matching fund challenge of up to \$250,000 is a chance to “double your gift”. That is a pretty compelling opportunity. How is that going?

At the end of 2018, \$107,338 remained to be raised to match the \$250,000 challenge. More contributions have come in the first two months of 2019. There is still \$104,509 to be raised to meet the match. We are hopeful that those who haven't given can do so, and that those who contributed in 2018 might consider a further gift in 2019. If we can make the match, we will have achieved our initial goal of \$650,000 in cash.



Rhona Kwiram,
President of the Green
Lake Foundation Board

What issues did the Foundation Board discuss at its March 5 meeting?

The Foundation Board invited the Church Board Chair, Head Elder, and Division leaders to join them for that meeting. The agenda included taking a tour of the property to see the progress made to date and the possibilities of what could yet be done, understanding the financial position of the project and the cash needs going forward, discussing the feasibility of finishing the basement, and discussing the highest and best use options for the House.

Green Lake already has a “Housing Ministry” at the former Jensen House (now called the “Green Lake House”). Would the Meridian House be an expansion of that ministry?

That is certainly one option which meets a pressing need. Demand from people needing housing while in Seattle for medical treatment was very strong in the first year of the Green Lake Guest Suite operation (2018). In some cases we have had to decline requests because the Green Lake Guest Suite was already booked.

Another option is for student housing?

Yes. Rents for students in Seattle can be challenging. Using the Meridian House for Adventist students attending local universities at subsidized housing rates would serve a real need.

Other options are to use it as a parsonage or as expansion space for current or future programs.

A final option is just to rent it to anyone willing to pay the rent.

Yes. We still have a loan obligation, renovation costs, and ongoing taxes and insurance costs to cover, so some cash flow from it is very important, particularly until the house is fully paid off.

Pastor McLarty has been a strong advocate and supporter of the Meridian House purchase and led out at the “House Blessing” on November 24. Does he have a specific use for the housing ministries in mind?

Pastor McLarty is open to the ideas of everyone in the Green Lake Church community. ✧

A New Year's Eve Party

What were you doing on New Year's Eve, 2018?

It was cold and damp. Maybe you were sitting by the fireplace, a cup of hot Postum in hand, sheathed in a blanket your great-grandmother hand-knit for you in 1950, snuggled up with George Eliot's *Middlemarch*? Or was it *The Complete Works of Cicero*? Your college Biology textbook?

Perhaps the TV was on and you were watching one of the college "bowl" games? Your own bowl (containing popcorn) was at the ready, and maybe you were keenly focused on the Nuteena Bowl game with Northeast Arkansas playing Odessa State on Channel 666?

In a more likely scenario, you were seated at the kitchen table, writing a check for your year-end charitable contribution to the Green Lake Foundation. If so, God bless you in 2019 and always!

And now, here is what actually happened. One of our members, Alvin Kwiram, popped by the Meridian House to check on some repairs on New Year's Eve. Who should he find but a fellow Green Lake compatriot, Don Mehrer, energetically engaged in digging out the sewer line as one of the various repairs underway at Green Lake's newest mission site.

In retrospect, some of us wish Alvin and Don could have shared a bottle of Martinelli's Sparkling Cider as 2019 approached. But the truth is more prosaic. They were working on the Meridian House. They weren't wearing tuxes on New Year's Eve. Blue collar clothes.

The Meridian House was in good shape, and the church was fortunate to have acquired the property, but a number of issues needed to be addressed:

- Repainting was needed throughout.
- Some rooms, especially upstairs, needed further drywall installed and existing work repaired.
- The heating system needed to be upgraded: asbestos insulation was replaced, hot water radiators reinstalled, some circulating pipes re-routed, and a new thermostat installed.

- The hardwood floors on the main level were refinished, and new carpeting installed on the upper level and stairways.
- The biggest problem was a break in the sewer line just before it joined the main sewer line in the middle of the street. This could have been a costly repair, but using the newer "sleeving" technique, we were able to get this done without digging up the street. As part of this project, we decided to replace the rest of the sewer line from the street to the basement so that we could install a bathroom and other utilities in the basement. (The existing sewer exited the house well above the floor level and was too high to allow for that.)



Almost all of that work has now been completed. Some work was hired out. But that does not count the many hours that your loyal Foundation Board members, Don and Alvin, put in doing both the planning and a good deal of the work with no remuneration. We are all indebted to them for their generosity of spirit and, indeed, much more.

There is more work to be done before the Meridian House campaign goal is met. If we can raise the funds plus some extra, the basement can be transformed into an additional apartment for ministry purposes.

In the meantime, we are grateful for all the sacrifices—physical, financial, and time—that Green Lakers have made in our latest venture in ministry, the Meridian House. ✧

"It Was a Godsend"

Any misgivings about whether the Church's Foundation-owned apartment in the Green Lake House could be a ministry to those in need have been dispelled. As one guest summed it up, "It was a Godsend at a very difficult time for us."

The Foundation's Green Lake House continues to serve as a rental property as well as a center for our Housing Ministry. The Guest Suite, located in the basement, is the center for the ministry, and first became available in September 2017. A stream of guests applied throughout 2018. Indeed, from mid-April to mid-October we were almost fully booked.

The Guest Suite is limited purposely to short stays, usually not more than a few weeks, and the focus is on individuals and families experiencing medical emergencies or trips to Seattle for educational purposes. Seattle is a medical center serving a large geographic area where people from throughout the Pacific Northwest and beyond come to access our world-class medical facilities and professional staff.

In the words of one guest, "My sister was being treated at the University of Washington Medical Center. It was a great encouragement and supportive blessing that words are inadequate to express." She continued, "We will endeavor to pay it forward as God opens doors of need for others that He places in our lives."

Another note of thanks said: "Thanks again so very much for making this apartment available to people in need. It is such a beautiful, meaningful ministry."

Another guest was an SDA graduate student from Africa, visiting UW for a global workshop and conference. It was her first trip to the United States, and she found the experience enlightening in many ways, even making the acquaintance of the upstairs tenants of the house.

Just recently a family came to our Sabbath service at Green Lake to express their thanks to the whole congregation. They were so grateful for a place for their family to stay while their father was in intensive care after suffering a terrible car accident. Family members came from various places around the country and found this a supportive haven to meet their needs during a difficult time.

For all those who supported the purchase of the Green Lake House, it is gratifying to see that our investment is paying rich dividends in helping many individuals and families.

For photos of the Green Lake House, its grand opening, and the commencement of the Housing Ministry, please see: <http://greenlakefoundation.org/resources/2017-Q3-GLF-Newsletter.pdf>. ✧

A CONVERSATION WITH DON AND SHIRLEY MEHRER

On April 16, 2016, Don and Shirley Mehrer were interviewed by Alvin Kwiram. Edited for length and clarity.

Let's start with some family background. Don, how and when did your family come to North America?

DM: My paternal grandparents, Johan and Augusta Mehrer, emigrated from Romania. They probably were part of a German community there. My dad Ben was born in 1910 in North Dakota, as were his sister Lydia and brother Harry. His older siblings were born in Europe, including his brother Jake and five others. There was a 15-year difference in age between the brothers Ben and Jake.

What was your mother's family name?

DM: Zimmerman

There was something significant about your father's brother Jake. What was it?

DM: Jake, my uncle, was Shirley's grandfather. Jake was Ted Mehrer's father. And Shirley is Ted's daughter.

So you are second cousins, once removed. What, again, is the family tie?

SM: Don's grandmother Augusta was my great-grandmother. I still remember meeting her when she was living in Prosser. I was nine years old. My dad talked to her in German and he put my hands in hers. My great-grandmother was blind.

Shirley, just for the record again, who were your parents?

SM: Ted and Hazel Mehrer.

Many of us in this congregation knew Ted and Hazel, of course. And when did Johan and Augusta emigrate to the U.S.?

DM: 1906.

What brought them to North Dakota? Was it a land grant or a farm?

SM: I think they wanted to get all the boys out of the country over there—away from the wars and things like that.

You have their application for citizenship, a priceless document because it lists all the kids and their dates of birth. Did they sail from Hamburg?

SM: I'm not sure. They sailed to New York. We have the name of the ship, built in 1899.

When did the Mehrers start to migrate from North Dakota to Washington?

SM: About 1934-35 when they had the dustbowl and the crops weren't good. Some family member had come west to the Yakima Valley—to the Prosser area, Grandview—and said it was the land of milk and honey.

Not all of the family came to Washington right away, is that correct?

DM: We had a farm in Bentley, North Dakota, and stayed there until 1955, some 20 years later. We had a mixed grain farm, and we raised cattle and chickens. It wasn't big enough to make a living.

Three-quarters of a section is a pretty good-sized farm.

DM: Well, not back there in North Dakota. [Laughter] I was 15 when we came to Washington.



No amount of land is sufficient if it's a dustbowl!

DM: One of my jobs in North Dakota was to collect the eggs from the chickens.

SM: Now he collects the quarters from the washers and dryers in our apartments. It's basically the same thing. [Laughter]

Were your family Lutherans?

DM: My mom was Congregational. Dad was Adventist. My mom, the Congregationalist, made a Christian out of him. [Laughter] He gave up smoking under her influence.

When you got to the Yakima Valley in 1955 you both ended up in the same Adventist school?

SM: Yes, Grandview Junior Academy. It had 60 or 70 students.

After a year at Walla Walla College, Don came to Seattle the summer of 1961?

Yes, I worked with my brother hanging sheet rock. I was 20. I lived in an apartment near the University of Washington, on 15th. It's still there today. I should have bought it! [Laughter].

You bought a duplex from Shirley's dad, Ted, who was a realtor, about that time?

SM: Don painted it blue and it was known as Old Blue. He paid \$10,000 for it, put \$1,000 down and then I agreed to put in \$1,000 worth of improvements. The seller held the contract. We don't own it anymore.

DM: The moral of the story is to start in real estate when you're young. If you're not too smart, time will take care of you. [Laughter]

You consolidated basically in the Magnolia area.

SM: One of the buildings that we bought there shows the way that Don operates. It was just a little house. Nobody was living in it and the grass was up to the windows. So he checked on who owned it, and it was a man whose mother had lived there. He had moved her to Portland with him, and they were happy to get rid of it.

You and Shirley went to Grandview Junior Academy together in the '50s but you re-connected in Seattle in the early '60s.

SM: I was working downtown at John Davis and Company, then it became Sherwood and Roberts, the mortgage and property management company.

So you got your start in the real estate business early as well.

SM: Yes.

You knew each other from Grandview. Then you re-connected in Seattle?

DM: She was going to the community college on Broadway, taking a sewing class. She had a transportation problem to get to class, so I provided transportation. We stopped for lunch and had a burger and pink lemonade, and carried on from there.

Was it the pink lemonade? Or that car you had?

DM: A '62 Chevrolet.

SM: He said I married him for that convertible. But I helped him pay for it, too. [Laughter]

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A Conversation with Don and Shirley Mehrer, *continued*

DM: It was a nice white convertible with a red interior.

SM: When we had our 50th anniversary, our kids had a cake shaped like the convertible. A red stripe down the side. I was sitting on the hood, Don was driving. All this was on the cake.

Shirley, let's talk about your parents. When your dad first came to Seattle, he got started in real estate and actually worked with one of the members of our congregation.

SM: Right. He worked with Hal Helmersen for a little while. In Grandview, he had been in the trucking business.

Shirley, your mom worked at the UW Hospital for a famous man, Dr. Belding Scribner, who developed the shunt that made dialysis practical. With Wayne Quinton, the two of them saved thousands of lives and extended the lives of many more. How long did she work for him?

SM: It was close to 20 years.

And your parents were very active in the Green Lake Church.

SM: My mom worked in the Sabbath School divisions for more than 40 years.

There is an award for teaching excellence in the divisions, named in honor of your mom's service, the Hazel Mehrer award.

DM: I think it's hanging out there. Elmo probably dusts it every week.

Ted did a lot of the maintenance and repairs around here, too.

DM: He did a lot of work solving a water problem in the new addition. They dug down and put in a footing drain. It was quite a dig, a hand dig. And out at Auburn Academy, he helped build the permanent RV sites that were used by those attending camp meeting.

Tell us about your children, Kim and Kurt, and where they went to school.

SM: Kim and Kurt attended Cypress School for a few years and then went to Auburn Academy. Kim went to Walla Walla for two years, transferred to UW, and then got her degree in Interior Design from Seattle Art Institute. Kurt earned his degree in business from Walla Walla.

When was Mehrer Drywall founded?

SM: 1963. Don had been working since 1961 with his brother Morris, but Morris was drafted into military service so Don took over. When Morris was out of the Army, they formed Mehrer Drywall. 1963 was the year we got married, too, on my parents' 25th wedding anniversary.

Shirley, you spent many years in the Sabbath School divisions.

SM: LaRene Mittleider and Connie Cook always helped me. We worked together really well. We had lots of other good help, too: Curtis Lacy, Loretta Wassé, Bruce Burden, Fred Mason, Pat Young, my mom, and Irene Jepson (pastor Clayton Jepson's wife).

Shirley, you were committed to putting on some great bridal and baby showers over the years, and some years you held multiple showers at your home.

SM: Kim, our daughter, and Pam, our niece, always helped with everything.

SM: Barbara Jonsen was the inspiration. When we had Kim, Barbara Jonsen did a shower for us. That's what inspired me. After Barbara did that shower, we started coming to church more regularly.



Your role in conceiving and then pushing for the elevator deserves special mention. At first there was little support, in fact, mainly opposition. But after much discussion, we launched a campaign to include both the elevator and the roof. Within six months, we had raised the money.

DM: I remember we were having some trouble at first, then our fund-raising committee decided to list the donors on a plaque in the lobby.

Yes, then the money rolled in!

DM: It reminded me of the hymn, "Is my name written there ... on the page white and fair?" [Laughter]

SM: Ted was constantly asking Don about the progress of the elevator construction. He was in an assisted-living facility, and he wanted him to see the formal opening of the elevator. Ken Fairchild dressed up as an elevator operator with the uniform and hat, and he gave Ted the first ride in the elevator. Everyone cheered, and balloons were released when he emerged and Ted said, "It is finished." Ted was pleased. He died the next Sunday night, so the elevator was finished just in time!

Everybody knows of Shirley's role in potlucks and reception. One other activity should be remembered—activities for kids at the church, including campfires and outings such as taking the Sabbath School kids to Discovery Park for services. And providing wonderful experiences on their boat, which was even used as a diving platform.

You have established an endowment for landscaping, which the Foundation has named the Mehrer Landscaping Endowment. Could you say a few words about it?

DM: We have always admired the flowering trees, the rhododendrons, and azaleas. We need to build up our landscaping endowment.

There isn't any place you can look in this church that has not had the impact of your efforts—kitchen, bathrooms, sanctuary, platform, landscaping, elevator—it's all been touched by Don's hands. It is a remarkable record of dedication to this church community from both of you. [Applause] ✧

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