

# Oak Ridge landmark gets new life

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**OAK RIDGE** - The Brick House Bed and Breakfast is nearly ready for business after two years of renovation work. The familiar brick house on Oak Ridge Road in Oak Ridge will hold an open house and fall festival on Sept. 14.

Glenn and Brenda Shick bought the long-time landmark in 2011 and wondered what to do with it.

"We first thought about a restaurant, but decided that it would be tough business in this area," Brenda Shick said last week. "Then we decided that it would make a better bed and breakfast."

Now that the plaster dust has

cleared and the usual old-house renovation nightmares have been dealt with, the 1820 structure looks nearly new.

The Brick House has eight guest rooms that can accommodate 16 guests. Each room has its own bath, one of which is handicapped-accessible.

All guest rooms have either a full or queen bed that fits into the overall 19th-century theme.

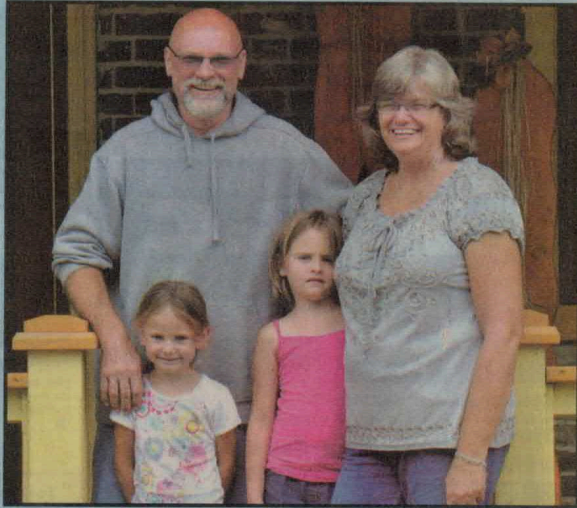
The rooms are named for local towns and the couple's two granddaughters.

"We used antiques wherever we could," Brenda Shick explained, "but we had to buy reproduction queen beds because they weren't available at the time the house was built."

Mr. Smith (formerly Smythe)

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**GLENN AND BRENDA SHICK**, along with granddaughters Hannah and Lydia Shick, are gearing up for an open house and festival Sept. 14 at the newly restored Brick House Bed and Breakfast in Oak Ridge.



built the house in the prevailing Federal style of the early 19th century, the first of its kind in the area. A rectangular structure with a side-gable roof, it was enlarged later by Frank Williams after he bought the property in the early 1880s.

Williams, the owner of the Oak Ridge Mining Company, modernized the house, giving it a Second Empire Italianate treatment. The additions he made produced the house's square footprint, hipped roof and cupola, which gave the brick house its current appearance.

Williams added the cupola as a convenient spot for keeping an eye on the activity of one of his mines' operations just yards from the back of the house.

Glenn Shick added a widow's walk around the outside perimeter of the cupola as a fresh-air relaxation spot.

"After we first bought the place," he said, "I came up here and sat for a while, listening to what the house was telling me it wanted to be."

The mine portal is still visible in the hillside behind the Brick House Bed and Breakfast and is being incorporated into a future gathering area complete with water features.

All those renovations have made the Shicks' job more than a little challenging.

"When we started working on the basement," Glenn Shick said, "the old poured-slab concrete of the porch floor started sliding against the foundation."

The result was a heap of



stone rubble on the basement floor that needed to be cleared away and laboriously rebuilt. The rebuilt basement's floor was lowered several inches. A portion of the area has been converted to a laundry and storage room that also houses the heating and plumbing systems.

Upstairs, Shick found more problems requiring ingenious solutions. One of the guest bedrooms has a quirky wooden beam running through its middle a few inches above floor level.

"This is one of the support beams for the house and we couldn't remove it," he said. "There was no way to build around it and still fit a bed into the room, so we tried to work around it."

The oddity gives the room a certain character matched only by a unique door on a nearby bathroom. The bathroom stands at the end of a short corridor, and its matching guest room is reached by a short stairway to the side.

A normal hinged door would not fit into the space without blocking the stairs, so Glenn Shick fabricated a sliding diagonal solution. Using a pulley salvaged from the property, Shick incorporated the hardware into the door system. The door now slides sideways and uphill.

Rube Goldberg-esque, yes. Attractive and charming, yes. Homemade and clunky, no.

Missing plaster, exposed lath, stairways bearing 1930s-vintage newspaper on the walls, scrap lumber and discarded doors have all been repurposed, giving a flavor of the past with some modern twists.

"We re-used a lot of materials to keep the basic feel of the house," Shick said, "and at the same time, it saved us a lot of money on the project."

The Brick House sits on a multi-acre site across the road from two creekside cabins the Shicks also own. A large attached gazebo-type deck serving as the back porch is awaiting finishing touches. Another garden structure sits several yards away in the back yard.

The parlor area of the house can seat about 18 people, making it a potential site for small group meetings. It opens into a small dining area that flows into the modern kitchen.

The Shicks want to market their establishment to residents in surrounding towns, especially for out-of-town guests. And the Brick House is located about half a mile from the Redbank Valley Trails system, making it a comfortable spot for hikers and bikers to rest after a day on the trail.

The owners have a cook and a part-time cleaning assistant at present. Otherwise, they are a two-person operation.

"We have a couple of other part-time helpers

lined up in case we need them," Glenn Shick said. "If the business grows large enough, we will probably hire more, but that's in the future."

The Brick House Bed and Breakfast will officially open for business at 10:30 a.m. on Sept. 14 during a ribbon-cutting ceremony. However, the Shicks have had a series of "soft" openings during the summer.

"We have had several weddings and receptions over the summer," Brenda Shick said. "We are booked nearly every weekend."

Tours of the house will begin at 11 a.m. following the ribbon cutting. At least 40 crafters' booths will be set up on the lawn.