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Unemployment rate is ... was scary, it was frustrating," she said. "The hard-

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NO PLACE LIKE HOME

And that's always true ... even if you haven't been in the house in Avondale for 75 years

By Charlie Patton
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In November, while he was at an Avondale house that his company had renovated, Mark David Major met an interesting visitor.

As Major was leaving the house, 88-year-old Margaret "Peggy" Becker and her son Peter Becker approached him.

"An older gentleman stopped me and told me his mother, who was with him, used to live in the house," Major wrote in an email to the Times-Union.

It was a matter of luck that they connected with Major because Peggy Becker lives in Fernandina Beach and can't visit Jacksonville unless somebody drives her there. Her son happened to be visiting and Major happened to be at the house when they came by to look at it.

The house, located at 1609 Challen Ave., was built on Edgewood Avenue in 1905 and moved to its current location in 1911. It was renovated in 2011 by Starr Sanford Design, a company with offices in Fernandina Beach for which Major is the business manager and Julia Starr Sanford is the president.

The house was featured on the 2012 Riverside Avondale Preservation Tour of Homes, billed as a "chic old farmhouse." About 1,500 people visited the house over two days.

In his email, Major wrote that he gave Becker a quick tour of the house and she seemed delighted, both because it was the first time she had been inside it in 75 years and because she was impressed with the renovation and the decoration that had been done.

"Ms. Becker even mentioned her grandmother would be proud to see how beautiful the house looked today," Major wrote.

Inspired by Becker's enthusiasm, Sanford and Major decided to invite Becker to visit the house again, this time to talk to a reporter about her memories of living there. That's what she did earlier this month.

"This was my grandmother's house," she explained as she walked for a second time in 75 years into the house where she had spent about three years in the middle of the Depression. "My mother grew up in this house."

Her grandfather had died in 1914, leaving her grandmother to raise five children. So her grandmother, who had taught school in Chicago, sought a job with the Deval County School system.



Margaret "Peggy" Becker, 88, revisited the house at 1609 Challen Ave. in Avondale earlier this month. The Fernandina Beach resident grew up in the 1905 farmhouse that was moved to Avondale and was part of the RAP Tour of Homes in 2011. The house was rehabilitated and decorated by Starr Sanford Design.

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Margaret "Peggy" Becker, 88, revisited the old house in Avondale she spent part of her childhood in. The house was rehabilitated and decorated by Starr Sanford Design and the firm's president, Julia Starr Sanford, was on hand to show Becker around.

Bob Self/jacksonville.com

HOME

(Continued from D-1)

"The superintendent told her she'd never be a teacher here because she was Catholic," Becker said.

So on what is now a sun porch — it served as a bedroom for Becker and her sister — Becker's grandmother opened a small grocery to help pay the bills.

But the store was gone by the mid-1930s when Becker's parents and their three children moved in with Becker's grandmother. An uncle also lived in the crowded house.

"This was the best place in town," Becker said, talking about the neighborhood.

As Becker stood in the living room, she remembered a baby grand piano that once occupied a corner and "a Christmas tree that would reach to the ceiling."

"Everything seemed bigger then," she said. "Now it seems so small."

The front door of the house was the original door. But Sanford had installed a new door between the living room and what is now the kitchen (it had been the dining room in the mid-1930s). That door came from the movie "The Legend of Ragger Vance," on which Sanford worked.

The new kitchen features a large one-piece sink that Sanford found in a salvage yard. The old kitchen at the

back of the house is now a storage area.

There was an outhouse in back of the house in the 1930s but by then the house had indoor plumbing, Becker said.

So they used the out-house as a coal shed and it was her brother's job to bring in coal every morning.

On washing day, a maid would boil their clothes in the backyard, then hang them on a clothes line to dry.

Sanford told Becker the story of how she got involved with the house.

Her client Greg Whyne, an Australian investor, liked what she had done with her Fernandina Beach home and asked her to find

a similar home in Northeast Florida and renovate and decorate it.

"He only invests in interesting, walkable neighborhoods," Sanford said. "He likes coming and staying here. It gives him a base in Florida."

Sanford asked Becker if she knew why the house was moved in 1911 but Becker didn't.

"I would think it was because your grandmother loved the house," Sanford said. "I think it's a great house."

Becker nodded in agreement.

"I wouldn't mind living in it now," she said.

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