

Larry Kolvoord AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Bill Gurasich, one of the founders of GSD&M, has restored and renovated the 105-year-old mansion at the corner of Rio

Grande Street and West Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard into an upscale boutique hotel called the Mansion at Judges' Hill.

Fulfilling a vision for historic mansion

Former dorm and drug rehab center is now an upscale hotel

By R. Michelle Breyer

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

For 105 years, the stately Goodall Wooten Mansion has graced the northwest corner of Rio Grande Street and West Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, just a few blocks from the University of Texas.

Over time, it has evolved from a luxurious residence to a dormitory to a sorority house to a drug rehabilitation facility. But for much of its life, the mansion needed some rehab itself.

Two months ago, the house was reborn again, this time as the Mansion at Judges' Hill, an upscale boutique hotel with antique furniture and fireplaces in some of its 48 rooms and an elegant restaurant on the first floor.

The project has earned praise from peers in the hospitality industry and the nearby Judges' Hill Neighborhood Association, which had fought earlier plans to turn the house into offices.

The metamorphosis is a testament to the tenacity and vision of owner William Gurasich, who was able to see past the once-bedraggled exterior to the possibilities inside.

"He looks at something, and he doesn't see the same thing you and I do," said Bill Wigmore, executive director of Austin Recovery, the building's former occupant. "He's a guy with vision."

Gurasich, 55, is an accidental hotelier. He helped found the GSD&M advertising agency more than 30 years ago, then went into real estate. He has developed suburban subdivisions and high-tech office parks. But he had never tackled anything like turning a rundown mansion into a hotel.

"I never intended to get into the hotel or restaurant business — ever," he said.

When Gurasich first saw the mansion, it was in sorry shape. Burgundy carpeting covered the longleaf pine floors. Water had rotted part of the structure. The once-lush gardens had been paved over decades earlier.

Built in 1898, the mansion and its extensive grounds were a wedding gift to Dr. Goodall Wooten, a prominent Austin citizen, and his new wife, Ella Newsome, from their fathers. A 1910 remodeling added a library and extended the gallery across the front. Five years later, the Wootens added massive hand-carved stone columns across the front.

Ella Wooten, widowed in 1942, sold the house after World War II. Over succeeding decades, it was a private residence, a student boardinghouse and a high-end private rehab center. In 1992, Austin Recovery, a nonprofit agency that serves medically indigent alcoholics and drug users, bought the mansion and the annex behind it, which was built in 1981.



Peter Yang photos AMERICAN-STATESMAN

In 1915, Dr. Goodall Wooten and his wife, Ella, added the massive hand-carved stone columns, above, across the front of what is now the Mansion at Judges' Hill. The hotel includes 48 rooms, such as the guest bedroom below, and an elegant restaurant on the first floor. Rooms start at \$129; three-room suites rent for \$295 a night.



History of the Wooten family

The Wooten family has left its mark across Austin, on houses, Boy Scout camps and a University of Texas private dorm.

Dr. Thomas Dudley Wooten, a Kentuckian, married Henrietta Goodall in 1853. The couple later moved to Austin, where Wooten became one of the first regents of the University of Texas in 1881. He was president of the board from 1885 until he died in 1906. The couple had three sons, Dudley, Goodall

and Joe.

Dudley was a lawyer, Austin city attorney, state representative and congressman.

Goodall, a doctor, was president of the Austin Chamber of Commerce in 1926 and 1937. In 1934, he donated land at Bull Creek to the Boy Scouts named in honor of his son, Tom. That is now the Courtyard subdivision at Loop 360 and Bull Creek.

Joe was a doctor and a UT regent.

But the cost of maintaining a century-old building was a drain on an agency battling its own problems. In 1998, Austin Recovery put the house up for sale and began hunting for a new location.

"The mansion is a gorgeous historic building, but we didn't have the funds to keep the repairs up on it," Wigmore said. "It didn't make sense as a treatment center. We needed to find someplace else."

Wigmore enlisted the help of Gurasich, who was a real estate adviser to the agency's board. Gurasich worked for three years to find a more suitable location for the center, eventually finding the 56,000-square-foot former

Charter Hospital off Research Boulevard in Far Northwest Austin.

A local developer had an option to buy the old mansion, planning to turn it into offices. The deals were scheduled to close two days apart.

But three weeks before the closings, the developer pulled out of the mansion deal. Gurasich provided \$1 million to Austin Recovery so it could go ahead and buy the hospital, hoping to recoup the money by selling the mansion.

He finally decided to keep the house. Gurasich initially considered turning it into offices, with plans to provide parking across the street, with

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PERSONAL FINANCE

Retirement hopes withering along with 401(k)s, IRAs

Despite warnings, Congress has taken little action to fix the retirement system

By Marilyn Geewax

WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — Americans are supposed to sail into retirement on as many as three converging streams of income: a company pension, a tax-advantaged savings account and Social Security.

But just as 75 million baby boomers approach retirement age, the sources of those streams are drying up.

In recent years, steel workers and airline pilots have been among the hundreds of thousands of workers who have discovered how easily pension promises can be broken when companies go bankrupt.

Millions of investors have seen retirement dreams recede as their 401(k) and IRA statements reported negative numbers quarter after quarter.

And even Social Security, the

sole source of income for one-fifth of all retirees, will begin shriveling within 14 years. Before people born in 1962 reach their 80th birthday, the Social Security Trust Fund will be exhausted, according to a government projection.

"This is becoming a catastrophe, and I'm not overusing that word," said Dennis Brommer, a United Steelworkers of America official in Canton, Ohio.

Despite warnings from retiree advocates, Congress has taken little action to shore up the retirement system.

When a blue-ribbon commission appointed by President Bush recommended that Social Security include private investment accounts, the stock market was sliding, and the idea went nowhere. Neither party has been eager to endorse other painful or expensive alternatives.

A few bills moving through Congress would make minor reforms to private pensions and 401(k) plans. But worker advocates say the provisions most

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Getting the shaft

Many retired Americans, such as David Leasure, aren't receiving the retirement payments they were promised, **back page**.

Haraz Ghanbari
FOR COX
NEWSPAPERS

Agency telling workers to limit dependence on Social Security checks

Federal retirement system faces 'serious financing issues' in future, officials say

By Marilyn Geewax

WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — For two-thirds of Americans age 65 or older, a Social Security check is their top source of income. For one in five, it's all they have.

But today's workers better not rely as heavily on the overburdened system, the Social Security Administration is warning.

"Americans really are counting too much on Social Security," Deputy Commissioner James Lockhart said. "We just put out our 75-year forecast, and it shows that over the long term, there are serious financing issues."

Social Security, established in

1935, provides a check to nearly all retired workers. To participate, workers and employers each pay taxes equal to 6.2 percent of covered wages, up to a wage ceiling of \$87,000 this year.

The system was designed as a promise between generations. Taxes on today's workers provide the monthly checks for yesterday's workers.

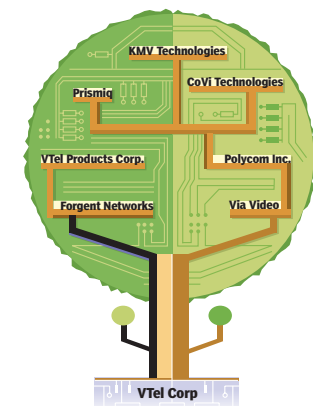
In 1955, the country had nearly nine workers for each person receiving Social Security. But with longer lives and lower birth rates, the government projects that by 2030, there will be only about two workers to support each beneficiary.

To prepare for this shift, the Social Security Administration has been building a reserve — at least on paper.

Tax revenue not needed to pay benefits is invested in special Treasury bonds, which make up

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COMING MONDAY



A high-tech family tree

Several Austin startups trace their roots to one of the city's home-grown tech companies — ViaVideo.

In Tech Monday

IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL SUNDAY

Talk the talk

■ **Doublespeak:** Translating official-ese on the strong dollar and deflation.

■ **Love & Money:** When a spouse comes up short on saving.

■ **Personal Business:** Planning ahead — for everything from dental care to airline tickets — can save you quite a bit of money. **WSJ-J3**

ALSO INSIDE

■ **Decimal dangers:** A new push to price investments down to the penny has serious implications for mutual funds. **Chuck Jaffe, J2.**