Woodmere Museum might buy Chestnut Hill convent

Peter Crippin

For almost 100 years, the Sisters of St. Joseph in Chestnut Hill have lived in the grandest of the 19th-century industrialists. What has been St. Michael’s Hall since 1878, when the sisters acquired it, started as an opulent estate for a string of wealthy Philadelphians.

The house, which was once the home of the late John P. Kieffer Sr., who ran Chestnut Hill College, wants to sell the 4.4-acre estate, which contains much of landscaped grounds. The last residents moved out in September, and the sisters hope to hand the house over to a good steward.

“We’re hoping that the next owner be the Woodmere Museum, just a stone’s throw away,” said Sister Maureen Lawrence, who oversees the museum.

William Valerio, the director of the Woodmere, sees the mansion’s 37,000 square feet as a perfect place to expand the art museum’s footprint and create the Multicultural Collection Study Center — a series of technology-enhanced classrooms and gallery spaces.

To do so, Valerio said, he would not only plan an upgraded "pipes and noles" on the ground floor. He already knows every nook of the place.

At the main entrance, Valerio pointed out the ironwork on the large heavy door associated with the early 20th-century artisan Samuel Yellin, whose ironwork can be seen in many churches in the Philadelphia area.

"We’d say it’s the school of Yellin. I would say it’s the school of Yellin," said Valerio. "I could have been made by his workshop or any number of artisans who were trained in his workshop." WOODMERE • 4A

Proms get a new look

Kristin Holmes

The cherished high school tradition synonymous with dressing up in gowns and dancing elegantly in ballrooms has been tempered by a pandemic.

"Prom means something to everyone this year," COVID-19 made sure of it.

Safety protocols have reshaped the rise of passage, prohibiting the most basic traditions at some schools including dressing and bringing a date. But for many, any approximation of a prom is welcome in a year marked by disappointment and uncertainty.

"Last year was upsetting. It felt like holding on to maybe one of the last things we’ve had," said senior Patience Sanders, 18, president of student council at West Catholic Preparatory High School in West Philadelphia.

"But we’ve made it this far, and I feel like the prom is a celebration.

Sanders attended West Catholic’s prom Wednesday at Ellis Preserve in Newtown Square. Students who attended were "pristine," Sanders said, while others attended "in-person,"

MOVE honors those from 1985 bombing, looks toward future

Sharyn L. Flanagan

MOVE members and supporters gathered Saturday at Cabrini Creek Recreation Center in West Philadelphia to mark this week’s 35th anniversary of the city’s siege on their Osage Avenue home that killed 11 people inside.

This commemoration had been planned before the conflicting headlines about the mishandling of human remains from MOVE members during the May 13, 1985, police raid.

On Friday, a day after Philadelphia’s health commissioner was forced to resign over the matter, MOVE members said they remain belonging to victims of a 1985 bombing of the headquarters of a Black organization, the city said those remains were never actually destroyed.

“We just want everyone to remember our family. Our movement, freedom fighters,” said Janine Africa, who has been in MOVE since 1973. "We’re not a number. They were our family. They were people and we don’t want them to be forgotten.”

The victims from that fire were: John Africa, 44; Raymond Africa, 49; Phil Africa, 26; Tree Africa, 14; Delisha Africa, 12; Tomas Africa, 9. Members

MOVE was flanked at the event by the leaders of all the school staff unions, including the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers."