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Thursday, Aug. 8, 1985/ OC

Were rolling in Pontiac — and so was the gas station. See/Page 3A

teaches agents the tricks of the travel trade. See Business/Page 6A

ketball stars get a chance to show their stuff. See Sports/Page 3B

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Free Press Photos by DAYMON J. HARTLEY

Wabeek Mansion was designed by Albert Kahn and built in the 1920s for Sen. James Couzens and his family.

Owner's dream is a return to glory for faded mansion

By MARYANNE GEORGE
Free Press Staff Writer

Michael Allen is going through a lot for his dream house.

But it's a lot of house—12,000 square feet, three stories, seven bedrooms (each with bath), marble fireplaces, parquet floors, steel I-beam superstructure, and a view of a lake complete with resident swans.

And it's a lot of trouble — curious passers-by, clouds of plaster dust, work crews coming and going, repairing years of vandalism, and the recovery of stolen pieces of the once-glorious, still-impressive structure in Bloomfield Township known as Wabeek Mansion. And there are the doubters, who wonder

COVER STORY

how such a young man — he gives his age only as "under 30" — can afford such an undertaking, or if he has something in mind other than restoration, such as an apartment conversion.

Allen said he has hauled away truckloads of brambles and trash from the Wabeek property and poured "garbage cans-full of money" into renovations that he estimates will cost a total of \$1.2 million.

A small, intense man who seemed glued to his radio-telephone during a tour of the pre-See MANSION, Page 2A



Ray Taylor of Detroit repairs plaster in the mansion. Owner Michael Allen estimates renovations will total \$1.2 million.

Officials in orbit as county gets Saturn jobs

By SANDY McCLURE
Free Press Staff Writer

While the South was busy heaving the North to win the new General Motors Corp. Saturn plant, Oakland County fell heir to the brains of the operation without much ballyhoo.

The new GM car will be built in Spring Hill, Tenn., but Saturn's world headquarters will be in Troy and its technology center will be in Madison Heights.

The Saturn operations and two other GM moves this year, bringing Electronic Data Systems and GMF Robotics to Oakland, will result in about 10,000 new jobs, said Joseph Joachim, the county's economic development director.

"This is the most visible expansion by one company in a one-year period that we've ever seen in Oakland County," he said.

The Saturn, GMF and EDS facilities have "really established Oakland County as the center of robotics and automated manufacturing systems in the country, even though we don't have the actual manufacturing facilities here," Joachim said.

THE COUNTY was always interested in luring Saturn facilities, but GM's announcement, on the heels of the news about Spring Hill, came as a surprise, Joachim said.

"I learned about it when I read it in the newspaper," he said.

Saturn's administrative staff is expected to start moving into a three-story facility at 1400 Stephenson Highway in Troy this month, said Bill Winters, GM media spokesman.

There is no start date for operations at the engineering and technology center in a building being renovated at 434 E. Twelve Mile Road in Madison Heights, he said.

Joachim said the Saturn plums fell into Oakland's lap as a result of the county's continuing campaign to tell the world it is a good place to live and do business.

See SATURN, Page 8A

He sees return to glory for Wabeek Mansion

MANSION, from Page 1A

Allen said he bought Wabeek on a land contract about three months ago from Robert Wolfson, an Oakland County developer. Allen said he and Wolfson have since become partners in a condominium project proposed for Waterford Township.

Allen would not reveal what he paid for Wabeek. Bloomfield Township assessor Richard Farms said the home is valued at about \$420,000.

The new owner of Wabeek described himself as a commercial real estate investor and chief executive officer of Integrated Trans American Inc., a property management company based in Melvindale. He also said he has full or partial interest in 250 apartment units throughout the Detroit area.

Allen, who plans to do much of the restoration work at Wabeek himself, said he learned construction skills as a child by helping his father fix up family-owned apartments. He said he started out in business by buying a rundown apartment building in southwest Detroit, renovating it and selling it.

He said he buys and sells commercial real estate as part of his business, but he bristled at the suggestion that he has some secret plans for Wabeek.

"THIS IS MY HOME and it always will be," Allen said. "Let time tell the truth."

"I plan to restore this place to the original floor plan in every detail," he said. "I've gotten a set of blueprints from Albert Kahn Associates, and there was even a set of prints for the door hinges throughout the house."

For Allen, the aura of Wabeek, named from a Chippewa Indian word that means "beautiful place," shines the obstacles in his path.

"Every day I love it more," he said of the stately Tudor mansion. "The only way I would ever sell it is if I was forced to. I've bought a masterpiece. It's like a Michaelangelo."

Even in its present condition, it's hard to argue with Allen's assessment of Wabeek, which has been vacant for 13 years and was boarded up by Wolfson to keep out vandals and revelers after the township sued him over the property's condition.

The mansion off Long Lake Road was designed by architect Albert Kahn and built in 1924-27 for \$1.5 million as a summer retreat for the late U.S. Sen. James Couzens and his family.

Only about 2 1/2 acres remain of the mansion's original 900 acres.

BUT STILL INTACT inside the house is a magnificent banister of carved walnut wrapping around the main staircase leading to a second-floor balcony.

Made by an entire family of artisans that Couzens brought from Europe just for the job, it may have been too heavy for the thieves who stole Wabeek's sets of French doors, its chandeliers and the marble from its fireplaces.

The Bloomfield Township Police Department helped Allen piece Wabeek back together, recovering bits of the place in their investigations.

"We returned a pickup truck full," said Det. Patrick O'Rourke.

Allen seems to have a genuine appreciation for details built into Wabeek by Kahn.

Once the damaged plaster walls throughout the house are repaired, Allen said, he will recover those in the

upstairs bedrooms with muslin, just as Kahn did, and paint the fabric rather than the wall, to prevent paint buildup on the plaster.

When he first took possession of Wabeek, Allen said, he swept carefully through each room to gather pieces of the broken marble fireplaces and carved moldings which he is reassembling.

"It's like a jigsaw," he said. "Every time I find a piece I walk around and see where it fits."

JOSEPH BEDWAY, public relations co-ordinator for Albert Kahn Associates, the architectural firm founded by Kahn, said that based on today's building costs, it would take about \$20 million to reproduce Wabeek.

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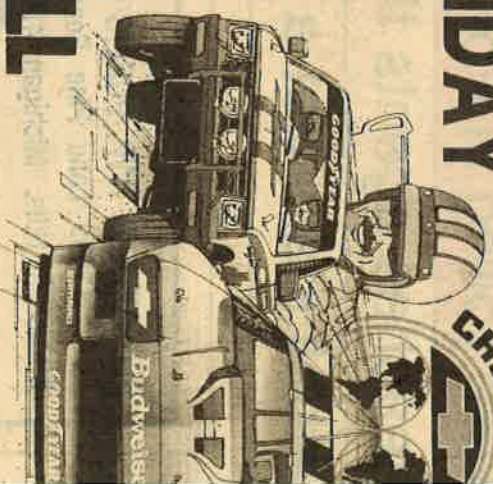
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