

# AT HOME

IN TOUCH  
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SECTION G

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# Restored Peace



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**ABOVE:** The Stark County News publisher Jim Nowlan sits in the living room area of his loft home in downtown Toulon. The loft boasts high ceilings and has an open floor plan. **TOP:** The downtown building that is home to The Stark County News is also home to Nowlan.



**ABOVE:** The living area of Nowlan's loft home in Toulon opens into the bedroom, where exposed brick remains a testimony to the aged feel of the building, which was built in the 1800s. The wide-plank pine floors throughout the apartment are covered mostly in Middle Eastern and Oriental carpets.

**RIGHT:** A drawing by Nowlan's great-uncle, Lee Townsend, a well-known artist and illustrator, hangs in Nowlan's home.



## Toulon man gives back to community by restoring historic downtown building

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** By some estimates, 90 percent of upper floor space in old urban buildings across America is abandoned or relegated to storage. Reclaiming this space and converting it to residential lofts is gaining momentum nationwide and throughout central Illinois. A monthly series starting today will feature a number of these renovations and the people who live in them.

It was a sense of responsibility that led Jim Nowlan to move from a 100-year-old cottage with 360-degree views on three acres of property south of Toulon into an even older, once-abandoned, roofless building in downtown Toulon.

"I saw this old building, and I knew it would be torn down if it wasn't renovated," said Nowlan, a former Illinois State legislator, University of Illinois professor and past president of the Taxpayers' Federation of Illinois.

"This town was very good to me when I was young and a wet-behind-the-ears candidate for office. I had

a beautiful childhood here, right out of Norman Rockwell, and this project was a way to give back. I believe in the richness of community."

### Reclaiming Abandoned Space

JIM NOWLAN

Abandoned second-floor space over commercial and retail space in small communities throughout America is common. Projects like the lofts on Seminary Street in Galesburg recognize and reclaim the unique character of this space.

In Nowlan's case, he relied on a friend, Carol St John, to help create a loft residential space in his 1893 building.

"If you could have seen the building before . . .

Please see **LOFT**, Page G2

# HOMEWORK

## Free design seminars

Roeckers Cabinets Inc., located in Studio 29, is offering free design seminars on the latest trends and developments in kitchen design.

A free continental breakfast is included. Reservations are required for the seminars on June 28 and July 12, both from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. Call 693-2929 to reserve a spot.

Since 1951, Roecker Cabinets has been a leading source of high-quality custom cabinets in central Illinois. In addition to its hand-crafted cabinets, Roecker recently added a number of pre-finished semi-custom cabinetry by manufacturers such as Kraft-maid. They can now provide the same top-quality service and design that Roeckers is known for at different price ranges.

For more information, visit [www.roeckercabinets.com](http://www.roeckercabinets.com) or stop by the showroom at Studio 29, 6523 N. Galena Road, Peoria.

## Home tour

Five historic homes will be featured June 21 during a home tour, part of the **Manito Historical Society's sesquicentennial** celebration.

The tour begins at 3:30 p.m. and runs until 7 p.m. Tickets are \$10 per person and can be purchased in advance at the Manito Community Bank or at the Old School House behind the bank from 2-4 p.m. on the day of the tour.

Among the homes on the tour is Ed and Teresa Buck's home, 201 S. Washington St. The Buck home was built in 1881 by J.A. Marshall for \$3,500. According to the "Mason County History Book," Marshall was "one of the most enterprising business men of Manito, being now engaged in the sale of buggies, surries, wagons, hardware, stoves and everything found in a first-class establishment of this kind."

For more information, call Terri at 968-7361.



**LEFT:** Jim Nowlan climbs stairs leading to his second-floor home in the Toulon building he owns. Nowlan, owner of The Stark County News, publishes the weekly newspaper from the lower level of the building. The mural at left was painted by a Chicago artist in the main-floor event hall.

**BELOW:** Children gather for Tumble Time across the hall from Nowlan's second-floor loft home in Toulon.

DAVID ZALAZNIK  
JOURNAL STAR

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## LOFT

Continued from Page G1

with a hole in the roof and no heat," St John said. "But abandoned second-floor space has beautiful trim, detail and architecture not seen in houses anymore."

St John said each floor of the building has about 4,000 square feet for a total of about 12,000 in the entire building.

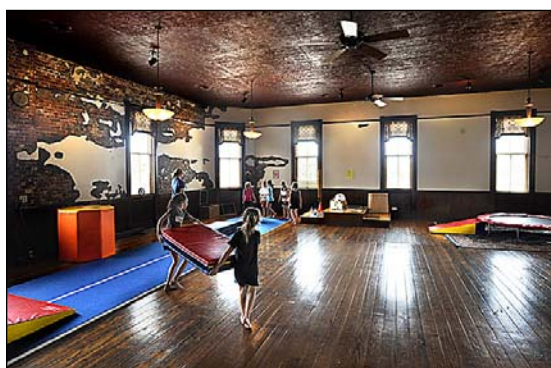
She designed Nowlan's apartment to capitalize on the high, 15-foot ceilings and huge windows. She left most of the space open, so the living room is connected with the kitchen, which flows into the bedroom. Only the bathroom is walled off and enclosed.

Brick walls are left exposed, even with partial sections of plaster left on. The walls are glazed. Some partial interior walls were constructed more to define space than to enclose it.

The wide plank pine floors in Nowlan's apartment and throughout the building are covered in mostly new Middle Eastern and Oriental carpets. Art on the walls was collected during travels in southeast Asia. He also has a number of pieces done by a great-uncle who lived in Wyoming, Ill., and was a professional artist who exhibited in New York.

Nowlan, 66, keeps his Toulon building as his main residence, but he's often working on projects in Chicago. He recently returned from teaching a semester in China at Fudan University in Shanghai. He writes a column for the *Oriental Morning Post*, a 300,000-circulation paper in China that started just four years ago.

In 2000, Nowlan restarted publication of *The Stark County News*, which was taken over by his



grandfather in 1910 and had ceased publication in 1983.

The paper used to occupy the front half of the first floor of his building. The paper now operates on the lower level, a space with exposed brick walls and Oriental carpets. The lower level used to be a pool hall with snooker tables, rotation tables, billiard tables and a false wall for concealing the action.

The first floor of the building used to be a bowling alley, space where Nowlan once operated a now-closed bistro. Originally, there was a furniture store in this space, and the owners had a funeral home upstairs. The furniture makers also made coffins.

Upstairs on the second floor, where Nowlan has carved out his apartment, there was an embalming parlor. Across the hall from the embalming operation was meeting and office space for the secret Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

"Upstairs used to be the Odd Fellows. Now I tell people there is just one odd fellow upstairs," Nowlan said.

The society's old meeting hall is now available

for rent. On a recent weekday, a local gymnastics teacher had rented the space for her tumbling classes, which lent a rhythmic, thudding noise to all operations in the building as youngsters ran, jumped and flipped over mats.

Nowlan's office is in the old Odd Fellow's office. With assistant Cristin Wilson, he's completing two books and working on other research.

Rick Collins of Trillium Dell Timberworks in Knoxville helped with Nowlan's building reclamation and renovation.

"Rick was able to use physics and experience to understand the weak points of the building and shore them up," Nowlan said. "I credit Rick for solving a million issues including triangular joists to reinforce the ceiling."

A steel cable runs the length of the structure to reinforce the walls.

When the renovation began, Nowlan could have qualified for more tax credits if he had gone through the process of applying and listing as a historic landmark building.

"I'm impatient. I just went ahead with the work," he said. "But whatever you think with a renovation like this, it costs 2 1/2 to three times more."

During the building's early heyday, when Toulon was a bustling town with four grocery stores, inquests were held in one section of Nowlan's building, that is now part of his apartment.

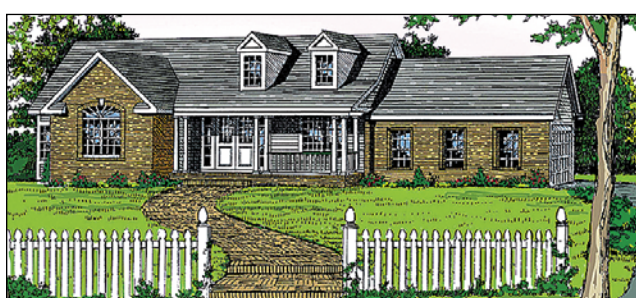
His loft apartment is about 1,500 square feet of the building's total 12,000 square feet.

"I tell people I live in a small apartment with a large dining room," he said.

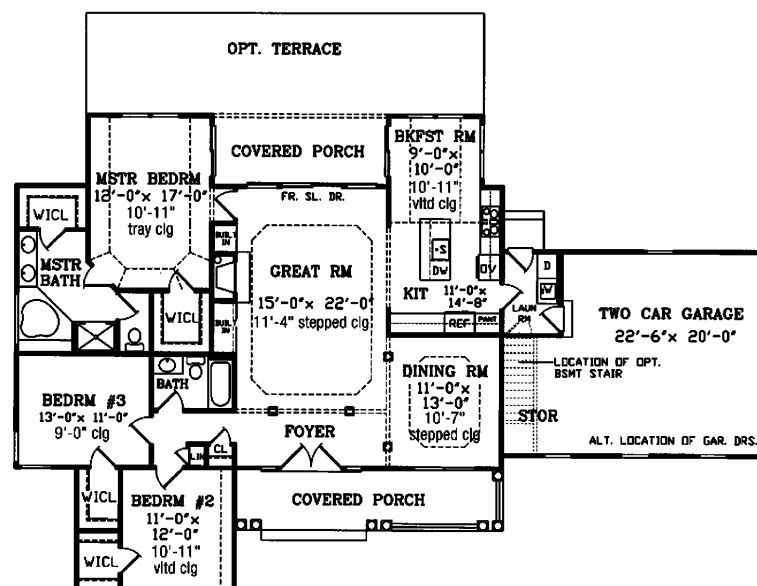
Overall, living in the heart of Toulon is peaceful and quiet, but Nowlan keeps ear plugs for one night of the year because the building is invariably rented out for New Year's Eve parties.

Clare Howard can be reached at 686-3250 or [choward@pjstar.com](mailto:choward@pjstar.com).

## HOUSE OF THE WEEK



**Statistics:** Design AX-301 includes a kitchen, breakfast room, dining room, great room, three bedrooms and two baths. The total living area is 1,783 square feet. This plan features a standard basement, crawl space or slab foundation, and the exterior wall framing is 2x4. The attached garage is 490 square feet.



## HOW TO BUILD YOUR HOME

Complete information on building is readily available through the *Journal Star*. A baby blueprint containing the full study plan of the House of the Week sells for \$10. Price includes cost of tax and postage.

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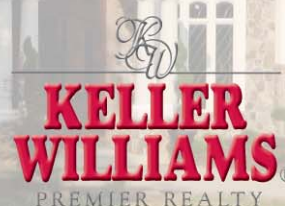
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