Bringing the History of UNH's President’s House to Life

Jan Dean’s new book showcases the home and the families who have lived there

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Shortly after the COVID-19 outbreak struck in the spring of 2020, Jan Dean found herself staring at a dining room table covered in a sea of tiny puzzle pieces.

With the world locked down and her husband, UNH President Jim Dean, navigating the uncharted waters of figuring out how to guide a university through a global pandemic, spending hours building 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzles proved an ideal escape.

“We were just desperate to have something to think about besides what was going on in the world at the time,” Dean says.

More than three years later in May 2023, 17 members of the UNH COVID Task Force – the key players who did, indeed, successfully guide the university through the pandemic – gathered around that same table, toasting the US Department of Health and Human Services’ announcement that the COVID-19 public health emergency had been declared over.

That dining room table, located in the president’s house – also known as the PresRes – on campus, has served as a gathering place during a host of significant and influential moments in UNH history, many of which occurred years before the Deans arrived in Durham. It was just one of the many things inside the house that intrigued Dean when she and Jim first arrived, a curiosity she ultimately turned into a book, “On the Corner of Garrison & Main: Inside the University of New Hampshire’s Home,” which is now available through Amazon (https://www.amazon.com/Corner-Garrison-Main-University-
"I hope that the book gives a voice to those other people who play such an important role in a president's time at the university."

Dean also recounts the changes and updates made to the PresRes itself through the years, from minor cosmetic adjustments made to suit the preferences of each new family to more significant alterations like the enclosing and screening in of a second-floor balcony in the 1920s and the most extensive refresh in the building's history under President Mark Huddleston in 2007, which included a complete makeover of the kitchen, the addition of a second-floor laundry room and the retrofitting of central air conditioning into the home.

Dean leaned on the university archives and student newspaper for much of her research, and also tapped into ancestry.com and newspapers.com. She gives particular credit to the UNH library's Morgan Wilson, public services coordinator, and Eleta Exline, scholarly communication librarian, for their key assistance.

Dean even found university connections where she wasn't expecting to throughout the process. She reached out to Sue Hertz, a professor in the English department, to find some freelance editing help and was connected to Maggie Wallace, an MFA graduate who took on the task. Another alum, John Herman, played a key role in formatting the book for publication.

Dean opted to self-publish through Amazon and will be donating all of the proceeds from the sale of the book back to UNH. A digital copy will be placed in the UNH Repository, as well – and the latter placement, Dean hopes, could provide an opportunity for the story of the house and its inhabitants to continue to develop well into the future.

"I really just want it to be a part of the university's history, and I feel it will be invaluable for future residents of the house. I can’t wait to share it with the next people who are going to be moving in," Dean says. "At the very end, as I wrote in my epilogue, I am hoping that the chronicle of life inside this house will carry on. The book will be in the digital archives, and I hope there will be people that will be able to add to it, that they'll take the time to put their experiences there, so in that way it will sort of become a living history."

https://www.unh.edu/unhtoday/2024/04/bringing-history-unhs-presidents-house-life
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