

Work begins turning Battersea into tourist jewel

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Published: Wednesday, September 24, 2008 4:16 AM EDT

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We wish her calm seas and smooth sailing.

Tempy Barbru, who joined the nonprofit group Aug. 1, has her work ahead of her.

First, she has to get the five-part Palladian-style 1767 home into sound shape. It will cost an estimated \$500,000 to start repairs and maintain the building.

"We want to shore up and preserve the Battersea building. That's our primary goal right now, to make sure the building is architecturally sound and can host lots of people," she said.

It will ultimately cost much more to turn the building and its surrounding property into the historic and tourist jewel that it can become. But first, Battersea officials are working on a long-term plan on exactly what should be done at the historic property.

Ultimately, Barbru will work on making Battersea a focal point for the history and culture of the Tri-Cities area.

"There's such excitement about all the potentials for Battersea," she said. "It's also going to serve, we hope, for a catalyst for many things. It will have an educational focus as well."

Battersea is an important Colonial plantation house that was constructed near the banks of the Appomattox River in 1768 for John Banister, first mayor of Petersburg, a Revolutionary delegate, congressman and framer of the Articles of Confederation. The sectional massing of Battersea displays the neo-Palladian style as popularized in England in the 18th century and embraced in Colonial Virginia.

During the Revolutionary War, British troops occupied the house on more than one occasion.

The city purchased the home and 37 acres of land for \$200,000 in 1985. In an inspired move, the city joined forces with the nonprofit group last year to make the historic Revolutionary War era estate a "focal point" for the Tri-Cities. It is just one example of the many partnerships in the area that we believe will play a crucial role in the revitalization of the region.

Barbru, a Williamsburg resident, comes from a long background of non-profit work, including two stints at WRHO, the Hampton Roads PBS affiliate. She became involved with Petersburg as part of the cleanup following the devastating tornado that ripped through the city in 1993.

"I like the vibrancy of Petersburg. I like to serve on something that becomes a catalyst for something greater," she said.

With some hard work, smart planning and a spirit of partnership, Battersea could become a catalyst for Petersburg.