



The upper floor of Michael Kidder's Greek Revival house was raised atop cribs, moved on a flatbed, and lowered onto a new first floor.

Change of Address

A nonprofit in Massachusetts moves historic structures to create affordable housing

BY ERIC WILLS

Michael Kidder wanted to build a new house to replace his dilapidated Greek Revival on Martha's Vineyard. But he never considered demolishing the old structure. Rather, he placed an ad in a local paper, asking whether anyone was interested in salvaging his 19th-century house. "It seems to be a thing we do on the island," Kidder says, "to donate a house and try to make use of what we've already got."

Kidder soon heard back from the Island Housing Trust, a nonprofit group dedicated to affordable housing on Martha's Vineyard. Six years ago, the trust helped start a program called House Moves, to rescue and reuse old homes, and soon Kidder had worked out arrangements for his structure. The bottom floor, a studio once used by an island artist who made weathervanes, proved beyond rescue. But the top floor was indeed salvageable.

The trust split the house in half, much like separating a two-layer cake, and carted off the top section on a giant flatbed. Then workers deposited it on top of a new first floor already built nearby, and just like that, a pair of island residents had a new home.

"I think more and more people are conscious of what a waste demolishing a home is," says Philippe Jordi, executive director of the trust, which has moved six houses so far. The program, he says, "is just a tremendous way of reusing existing resources." It also provides housing for residents such as carpenters and teachers, often priced out of the island's real estate market, and preserves a sense of community.

The concept is not without its challenges. People have to be willing to donate their houses (they can apply for a federal tax deduction), and pay the cost of moving the structures. And the Island Housing Trust has to find affordable lots where the donated houses can be rebuilt.

Nevertheless, donations can prove advantageous for homeowners. In addition to potentially lower tax bills, they can save the considerable costs associated with transporting demolition waste off Martha's Vineyard. "I've said that throwing away a piece of Sheetrock here costs more than buying it," Kidder says. "If you can recycle, it's just a better deal for everyone."