



Some of the first guests to the Selma Mansion in years pose for a photo Monday. They gathered at the soon-to-be-restored house to celebrate the new Sharon D. Virts Foundation's first donation, a \$10,000 grant to the Land Trust of Virginia. (Danielle Nadler/Loudoun Now)

After Saving Selma, Virts Boosts Land Trust's Preservation Efforts

2016-08-16 2016-08-16 Danielle Nadler

"Welcome to Selma."

Sharon D. Virts said to a crowd gathered in the shadow of the grand Selma Mansion Monday afternoon.

Those words likely have not been spoken on the dilapidated and once-abandoned property in years. But on Monday, Virts and Scott F. Miller, who together purchased Selma, invited about 50 people to tour the 18,300-square-

foot home and get a glimpse of the early stages of the massive effort to restore it to its former glory.

While much of the attention was paid to the stately, 20-room mansion during the event, it was meant to serve as just a backdrop for the introduction of the Sharon D. Virts Foundation.

Virts, the founder and CEO of FCI Federal in Ashburn, told those gathered that she grew up three miles from the Selma Mansion. Her beginnings were humble, but she took every educational opportunity that came her way and has seen success in her company, a government services provider that has been repeatedly ranked as one of the country's fastest growing businesses.

"It's time to start giving back to this community," Virts said. "I firmly believe in giving back to the community from which you came."

The foundation will focus on four "fundamental pillars": education, culture, health care and opportunity.



Sharon D. Virts talks about her passion to revive a piece of Loudoun history in the Selma Mansion. (Danielle Nadler/Loudoun Now)

"I established my foundation to focus on preserving the culture and history of our county while embracing economic progress that improves access to cutting-edge health care, education and transportation systems," she said.

Virts presented the foundation's first award, a \$10,000 grant, the Land Trust of Virginia. The organization partners with private landowners who voluntarily protect and preserve historically or ecologically significant properties.

Land Trust board member Jim Rich said "every penny" of the funds would go toward the organization's mission to protect and preserve valued cultural sites and open spaces. He said there are so many great homes in the commonwealth that would have been lost if it weren't for private citizens like Virts and Miller. On that list is Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and, of course, Selma, he said.

"Not only do we see progress being made to restore an architectural gem," Rich said, "we see an important piece of Loudoun, the commonwealth and the nation."

The Restoration Effort

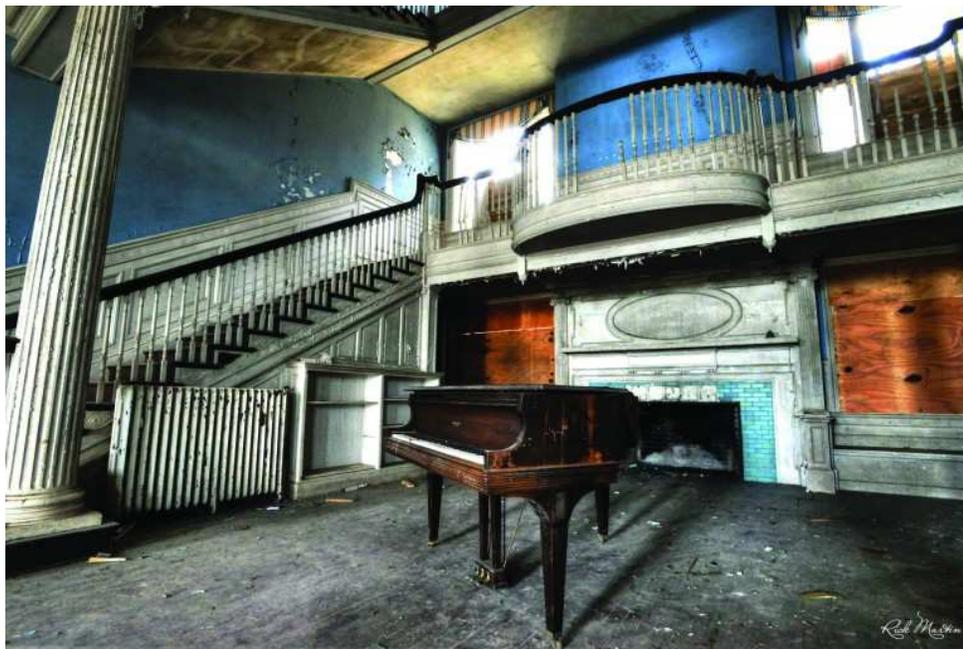
Selma Mansion, located along Rt. 15 north of Leesburg, is best known as the residence of Armistead Mason, nephew of founding father George Mason. After passing to different owners, a major part of the house burned in the late 1800s. In 1897, Selma was sold to Elijah Brokenborough White, who reportedly started building the mansion that sits on the property today not long after his purchase, completing it in about 1902. The property changed hands over the years and became a favorite venue for weddings and charity events.

Virts and Miller purchased the property in March from Dutch businessman Peter J. ter Maaten, who'd owned it since 1999. Since then, the new owners and their team of architects, engineers, and construction workers have made some exciting discoveries.

The Selma mansion. (Rick Martin Photography)

For one, they found that decorative trim on the doors that was thought to be plaster is actually pewter. Taryn Hollis, who guided visitors through the home Monday, said the Whites polished the trim daily because the pieces' high level of silver made them turn quickly.

"So they eventually just painted over them," she said, noting that it's one of the few expensive, decorative items that was not stolen over the years when the manor house set empty and unmaintained. "The thieves just thought it was plaster. So that's a blessing."



The

couple plans to restore the property, which will become their private home, over three phases. The first will be on the main house, parts of which date back to 1814; the second will be an addition to the back of the house that will include a garage and bedrooms; and the third phase will focus on the grounds. The family wants to build a tiered landscape along the front of the house with space for gardens and a pool.

The first two phases are on schedule to be done in December 2017.

“Cross your fingers,” Miller said, “and we’ll have a big Christmas party here for the opening.”

[\[Read more about Selma’s history and the restoration effort here.\]](#)

The Selma Mansion (Rick Martin Photography)

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