

OM Sanctuary: History

On July 27, 2011 Oshun Mountain Sanctuary, Inc. (OM Sanctuary), became the new owner of the iconic former Richmond Hill Inn. OM Sanctuary is a non-profit dedicated to creating a sanctuary for inner renewal, providing education in holistic wellness, spirituality, the inner life, personal development, and experiences to renew the body-mind-spirit, reconnecting individuals with themselves, community, and with nature.

According to the previous owners of Richmond Hill Inn, the Michel Family, "OM Sanctuary is a project that we as a family believe in. Richmond Hill Inn was a labor of love for our family - our gift to the community of serenity and beauty coupled with wonderful food and preservation of the 1889 Victorian Mansion built by Richmond Pearson that we rehabilitated to honor and preserve a piece of the rich history of WNC. OM Sanctuary, we believe, represents the next generation of what Asheville is and has been noted for - health, wellness and rejuvenation."

The Preservation Society purchased the famous 1889 Victorian Mansion in 1984 to save the historic building from demolition. The Michel Family assembled 45-plus acres in addition to the original seven while they owned the property. In 1989, the Michels opened 12 guest rooms in the mansion and Gabrielle's Restaurant, Asheville's first 5-star restaurant. The family opened the Croquet Courts, nine cottage rooms, in 1991. After arson burned the original Garden Pavilion, they rebuilt a new pavilion in 1996. On March 9, 2009, a still unsolved arson destroyed the 1889 Victorian Mansion.

In our fast paced modern society, many individuals are looking for ways to improve their health, de-stress, up-lift their spirit, and re-educate themselves on wellness. OM Sanctuary, when completed, will be a beautiful destination place offering contemplative spaces, mindful living, healthy food, body-mind-spirit-centered programs such as yoga and meditation, and well-being services all in one unified complex.

Over the past few years the property has undergone neglect, the 2009 fire and bankruptcy. The Michels reclaimed the property before selling it in 2010 to OM Sanctuary. OM Sanctuary received incredible support to raise the money necessary, including a \$1.5 million loan from the Michels, to purchase the \$4.5 million property.

OM Sanctuary has many tasks to complete before they can open their doors to the public in 2013. As the funding comes in, the next phase will be deferred maintenance, demolition and clean-up of the Pearson Mansion burn site, and the rebuilding of structures necessary for the facility. OM Sanctuary has an additional \$5.5 million to raise.

The project visionary, Shelli Stanback, OM Sanctuary Board Chair and a long time advocate for the "Whole Person and Whole Planet" concept offers, "I always knew Asheville, with its nurturing mountains, streams, and outstanding talent sprinkled throughout the region, would be an amazing location for a body-mind-spirit oriented wellness center. This city with its community focus is a perfect place to create the leading model we are currently working on for a "Unified Campus" offering programs to both the residential day user and extended-stay visitors. There is no current model for what we intend to create. What we have found as a model is usual for-profit or is primarily serving overnight program guests only."

RiverLink is the fiscal agent for the new non-profit and taking donations specified for OM Sanctuary.

According to Karen Cragolin, executive director of RiverLink, "Magic occurs when philanthropy, an adopted and respected plan and a great idea based on community legacy, history and values merge. When you add the French Broad River's rebirth and water to this mix you create rejuvenation and renewal as well as synergy, jobs, health and a sustainable project. We are calling this potent mix the OM Sanctuary."

With the help of the WNC and extended communities supporting this project, everyone can have something spectacular that Asheville, and our state, can call "OM".