

Couple become activists to combat neighborhood blight

Julie Hill and David Coffey didn't aspire to be community activists, they just wanted to live in peace and comfort in their Union City, Tennessee, home. The UT Martin professors married in 2008 on the grounds of the property Julie purchased at 625 East Main Street in 2005, when the Martin native returned to West Tennessee to accept her dream job, teaching percussion at her alma mater. David, a transplanted Texan who teaches history at UTM, offered home improvement tasks to work his way into Julie's life. He helped install a koi pond and built a deck and a pergola in addition to turning a cluttered, bug infested basement into a stylish den and entertain-

ment venue. With the help of Julie's late father and a team of gifted craftsmen, the couple turned a tired old house into their dream home; they call it "Paraiso," paradise in Spanish.

The house and its grounds took on the special meaning that comes from hands-on treatment and hard work. But paradise was soon threatened. The unexpected death of a next door neighbor left a large house in the hands renters and soon the property was in visible decline. The new neighbors posed other challenges: noise and junk, prompting Julie and David to erect a privacy fence that did little to ease fears of further neighborhood decay, fears stoked by a visit to blighted



Julie Hill & David Coffey at Gloria's

Detroit. The couple saw the home they so carefully created—not to mention a substantial capital investment—in peril.

When the longtime neighbor who lived behind the Hill-Coffey compound moved out, exposing yet another property to a rental nightmare, something like desperation set in. The couple thought about moving but couldn't stand the idea of leaving something in which they had invested so much. Julie sought support from the city and reached out to concerned neighbors in an effort to address the neglected property situation, but these efforts—city council appearances, petitions, and door-to-door campaigning—brought

little hope.

Just when it seemed like a lost cause, Julie and David caught a break. A large vacant lot behind their home went up for sale and they pounced, securing the property and opening the prospect of additional acquisitions. More good fortune came in the person of Larry Mink, who had purchased the small house recently vacated at 622 Exchange, adjacent to the lot. Mr. Mink and his team completed a thorough renovation of the house and promised only solid renters, but when Julie approached him about purchasing the little house, he agreed to sell. Julie and David now doubled down,

See **GLORIA'S**
Page 11



Custom Kitchens & Baths

CABINETS BY:

Bertch - Kith Kitchens - Fairmont Designs
Masterpiece Collection

LIGHTING BY:

Elk Lighting - Golden Lighting

CUSTOM TILE:

Mosaic - Glass - Stone - Metal

FRIGIDAIRE APPLIANCES - FLOORING ADD-ONS
UNDER CABINET LIGHTING

Design Services By Juliet Dillard

State Of The Art, Computer Aided Design Program So
You Can See Your Kitchen Or Bath Prior To Purchase

Vowell & Sons, Inc.

Get it done better with Vowell and Sons

731-587-3828

1000 Broadway St., Martin

www.vowellandsons.com



Serving Building Professionals & Homeowners Since 1895 • FREE On-Site Consultation