

The Times

Rehabber sees bright future for Marktown

BY JIM MASTERS, Times Correspondent

This story ran on nwitimes.com on Tuesday, January 14, 2003 1:01 AM CST

EAST CHICAGO — Howard Shaw would have been proud of the work Rafael Bejar is doing to rehab one of Marktown district's historic homes at 408 Spring St.

Shaw, Marktown's architect more than 80 years ago, would be happy to know about one man's effort to preserve the Tudor Revival architecture of 1917.

Bejar, 29, a cabinet and countertop maker by trade, has been spending most of his spare time since July 2001 hanging new drywall, laying tile, painting, rewiring and replacing the plumbing. The trademark stucco exterior will be refinished and repainted this summer.

Bejar said he's sinking about \$15,000 of his own money into the two-story, 800-square-foot house. A self-taught handyman, Bejar is doing work with the help of his mother, Maria Carrillo, and brother, Jose Carrillo.

Bejar said he doesn't plan to stop with rehabbing just one home, and will either rent or sell them to people who will be assets to the community.

Marktown holds a special reverence for Bejar, who lived there for seven years and now resides in Whiting.

His highest hope, he said, is for other Marktown property



TASOS KATOPODIS / THE TIMES Maria Carrillo makes repairs Saturday to the 1917 bilevel house she and her son, Rafael Bejar, are restoring in East Chicago's Marktown. They have restored the wood floors, bathroom and kitchen and in the spring plan to work on the house's exterior.

owners to follow his lead and help preserve the neighborhood's legacy — architectural and otherwise.

"I've seen pictures of what Marktown used to look like," Bejar said. "It was amazing."

Marktown historic preservation expert Paul Myers said there have been other rehab projects in the neighborhood, but no one has done it to the extent of Bejar, who completely gutted the house with the exception of the original maple floors.

If such rehab projects continue, there's no reason why Marktown couldn't experience the same rebirth as Chicago's historic Pullman district, Myers said.

"Because of historic preservation efforts in Pullman, homes are now selling for

\$100,000 to \$150,000, and many of those homes are smaller than those in Marktown," he said. "We could turn Marktown around in 10 to 15 years like they did in Pullman in 30 years."

Marktown is certainly unique, if not architecturally, then by location, which is immediately north of Riley Road in the shadows of the ISG steel mill and BP's Whiting refinery.

Location and isolation of Marktown is a problem in attracting new residents, Bejar said, and so are perceptions, which he's trying to erase.

He envisions a revitalized neighborhood of decades ago where everyone took pride in their home and the community's overall well being.

(reprinted with permission)