



St. Vincent's Academy News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SVA 2014 Tour of Homes & Tea October 18, 2014

*Proceeds from annual Tour only source of funds
to preserve the Convent of St. Vincent de Paul*

SAVANNAH, Ga. – Through the generosity of presenting sponsors St. Joseph's/Candler Health System and Optim Orthopedics, St. Vincent's Academy hosts the 2014 Annual Tour & Tea to benefit the preservation of the Convent of St. Vincent de Paul on Saturday, October 18, 2014 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

This popular self-guided tour features the original 1845 Convent of St. Vincent de Paul, six private homes in Savannah's Historic District, and the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. New to the Tour this year, Sisters of Mercy from Savannah will guide visitors through the Convent, and participants will be able to enjoy a mini-concert and behind-the-scenes tour of the organ loft in the Cathedral.

This year's Tour of Homes promises to be a fascinating look inside of these historic buildings. Some of the homes reflect their origin in architectural style, interiors and furnishings, while others offer an exciting eclectic approach to downtown living.

The centerpiece of the tour is the elegant Tea that will be served on the grounds of the Convent. St. Vincent's Academy students will serve a delicate repast of tea, homemade confections and traditional tea sandwiches while guests relax and enjoy a break.

This is the only tour of homes scheduled for the fall season in Savannah and has been noted by Savannahians and out-of-towners alike as "the best tour in Savannah."

About the Convent

The Convent of St. Vincent de Paul is a large and architecturally important building designed by noted architect Charles Cluskey that was completed in 1845. It is located in the Landmark District of Savannah. It is the original home of the Sisters of Mercy in Georgia, and along with its Sisters, has continually served Savannahians in many ways as a school, hospital, and orphanage for nearly 170 years.

The proceeds from the annual St. Vincent's Tour of Homes & Tea are the only source of funds to preserve this Convent building. One hundred percent of the dollars generated by this annual tour goes directly to "The 1845 Foundation" for building restoration.

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The windows and ironwork on the south side of the Convent building were recently repaired with funds raised by previous St. Vincent's Tour of Homes & Teas at a cost of \$37,570. Similar repairs to the east side of the building, which faces the courtyard, still need to be done. The goal of this year's Tour of Homes & Tea is to raise \$30,000 for these repairs. (See more information on the Convent below.)

Tour and Ticket Details

What: St. Vincent's Annual Tour of Homes & Tea Presented by St. Joseph's/Candler Health System and Optim Orthopedics

When: Saturday, October 18, 2014, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Where: Six private historic Savannah homes, the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, and the 1845 Convent of St. Vincent de Paul

Tickets: \$45/person; tickets purchased by September 30 are \$40/person

Maps: The Tour map will be printed on tickets and brochures for easy reference. You may visit the tour sites in any order and at your own pace. Please allow at least three and a half hours to visit all the tour sites.

Order: Online at www.svatourofhomes.com or visit one of the following locations:

- E. Shavers, bookseller, 912-234-7257, 325 Bull Street
- Go Fish Clothing & Jewelry Co., 912-231-0609, 106 West Broughton Street
- Candler Wellness Center, 912-819-8800, 5353 Reynolds Street
- J Paige, 912-897-1525, 107 Charlotte Road
- EJ Scandals Clothing Store, 912-356-1477, 8511 Ferguson Avenue Savannah
- St. Joseph's Gift Shop, 912-819-2064, 11705 Mercy Boulevard

Day of Tour: To purchase tickets the day of the tour, go to the tour ticket office in Walsh Hall at St. Vincent's, located on the corner of Lincoln and Harris Streets, between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Cash, checks, and credit cards accepted.

Docents: Onsite docents will provide history and answer questions.

Cathedral: There will be guided tours of the art and architecture of the Cathedral throughout the day and mini-concerts at 11:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m., and 3:00 p.m. Guests may go to the organ loft, which is normally off limits, for a five-minute presentation and a question and answer session following each concert.

Parking: Parking is free on Saturday on all Savannah streets.

Accessibility: Most of the tour sites are NOT wheelchair accessible and may feature high stoops with steps to climb.

Restrictions: In order to protect these historic sites, no high-heeled shoes, strollers or photography will be allowed.

Transportation: Self-guided walking tour. A municipal shuttle bus runs throughout the downtown historic district. For specific bus route information, visit: www.catchacat.org. Ask about trolley transportation to sites as well. For only \$10, the trolleys will make stops every fifteen to twenty minutes at each location.



Convent of St. Vincent de Paul: Savannah's Living Legend

Savannah is a unique American experience that allows people to actually be part of real American history. We walk on cobblestones that arrived on ships from England, when we were King George's Coastal Empire and Low Country settlement. Our warehouses on the river held the cotton bound for ports all over the world. We have residences that have been restored and have survived from Savannah's first settlers. We share our history every day with visitors from around the world. However, there is one Savannah story that not even all Savannahians know.

A dignified, historic building has stood on the corner of Liberty and Abercorn since 1845. Throughout these years, this Convent has served hundreds of Sisters of Mercy in residence. They were among the first teachers in Savannah. They built and opened St. Joseph's Hospital. They established St. Vincent's Academy, the oldest Mercy secondary institution in continuous existence in America. All of these women, every year since 1845, have served Savannah's sick, her poor, and her children. They have been, and remain today, a formidable part of Savannah's ongoing history.



It all started when two of these dedicated women arrived in Savannah from Charleston in 1843. Within two years, the construction of this Convent was complete, and more Sisters arrived to help with the task of making the building—among all of the other service they were responsible for—a home for the orphans of Savannah. For 30 years, they took in children of war and disease, eventually establishing actual orphanages to serve Savannah's orphans.

The Convent archives have harrowing accounts of these women going into the streets to help those sick with Yellow Fever in 1854 and 1876. Records show the scores of dead bodies they would drag to areas where they could be picked up for burial and of the many orphans they would collect and take with them into the Convent. In 1876, more than a thousand people died within two week of this virus. Thousands fled the city, leaving businesses closed and inextricable confusion. More than 60 percent of the victims died over a period of six or seven days. These women stayed and worked night and day to serve Savannah.

The Archives of this Convent are probably the most reliable, unbroken reflection of life in Savannah for the past 170 years. We have no way to estimate how many lives these Sisters and their building have saved and shaped—no way to estimate how many neighbors would not be here if their great, great, great, (great??) grandparents had not been saved by the kindness of these Sisters. So many generations have been affected by service and kindness provided in this building.

Today this Convent is still home to the Sisters of Mercy who are teachers or administrators at St. Vincent's Academy. St Vincent's has generation upon generation of class photos on the walls. It provides the finest private education for girls in Savannah and, no doubt, throughout the state. Throughout these

170 years, thousands upon thousands of Savannah's young women have learned, grown, and flourished in this building.

For the past 10 years, the Sisters and dedicated volunteers have organized the St. Vincent's Tour of Homes & Tea. One hundred percent of the money raised from this effort is used for the ongoing restoration of the historic building. To date, the tour has produced more than \$280,000 and has remained the only source of funds for much needed restoration and preservation of this historic building.

Year after year, generous and kind Savannahians have opened and shared their homes to support the Convent building restoration.

Always as part of this Tour, the Sisters invite everyone into their home, the Convent. They also put on a proper Tea in the courtyard, with St. Vincent's students serving the tea. This part of the tour is a most charming experience.

Come be part of Savannah's "Living Legend," where notables like Flannery O'Connor attended school, where the daughter of Jefferson Davis participated in the commencement exercise of 1865, where strong women are "good today and better tomorrow." (Catherine McAuley, Founder, Sisters of Mercy).

