

They're not in Oklahoma anymore

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 By Diccon Hyatt



Tyrone Palmer and Mariann Cook in their Trenton Home.
 (Staff photo by Diccon Hyatt.)

When Mariann Cook got a job as a music theater voice professor at Rider University this fall, she knew that she and husband Tyrone Palmer would need a home that matched what they were used to in Oklahoma — that is, plenty of space for a reasonable price.

Such a thing couldn't be found in Lawrenceville, nor Princeton. But when Cook saw an ad on Craigslist for a 4,000 square-foot home on Fisher Place in Trenton for the same price as a 1,700 square-foot home in Lawrence, she knew she had found what she was looking for — provided there wasn't a catch.

"My first question was, 'what's wrong with it?'" she said.

Cook and Palmer, who is a carpenter, looked into the house more and more and liked what they saw. The historic three-story home had been purchased as a foreclosure by the DeRosa Group, a Trenton company that specializes in historic renovations. They were completely renovating the inside of the home, and were adding central heat and air conditioning.

The only thing keeping the price down was its location in Trenton. But Cook and Palmer, being natives of Oklahoma, didn't know about the city's reputation.

"My lawyer that I hired to complete the transaction called me in Oklahoma and asked me if I knew about Trenton and if I had looked at the neighbourhood," Cook said. "She wanted to make sure we understood, and we assured her that we did."

Cook and Palmer came to understand that Trenton had a reputation for making headlines with crime. But they figured the neighborhood was good, and besides, they had already fallen in love with the house. They bought it without ever visiting.

Cook and Palmer moved in during the blizzard Dec. 19, and haven't regretted their leap of faith.

"Every time I pull up to that house, I think how much I love it," she said. "I just look at it and think how much I love it. It's fun to be in and it's fun to look around, and it's fun to explore."

"So far, it's been a good experience," Palmer said.

Cook began her job as a musical theater professor in September. A Broadway veteran, Cook once played opposite from Yule Brenner in a production of *The King and I*, and spent six years as a singer in New York City.

Because of her time in New York, urban living was familiar to Cook. But going from Oklahoma to New Jersey still took some getting used to.

"I've never been honked at so much in my life," she said.

Palmer, who has been married to Cook for six years, is taking advantage of Rider's tuition remission to finish a theater degree. He said Trenton's location is great because he can take trips to cultural institutions in Philadelphia and New York City easily.

Cook is overseeing Rider's absorption of the musical theater program of Westminster Choir College, which is being moved to Rider's main campus over this year and the next. She said making connections in the Trenton Community may help her expand options for Rider's music theater students.

The DeRosa group is working on a number of other restoration projects in Trenton. They have restored an abandoned building at 354 South Broad St. and turned it into a business incubator, and are turning the Weights and Measures building on Hanover street into a six condominium unit.