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The University president's home, a four-floor mansion which comes complete with museum art pieces, stands empty while a committee searches for its next occupant. Photo by David W. Zahn

President's residence sits idle

By BILL MANNY
Of the Emerald

In the home provided for University presidents, there's a sign propped against a vase of flowers and cattails in the stairwell between the second and third floors.

It reads "Public Restrooms Downstairs."

Therein lies the public-private dichotomy of life for the University President.

The University provides its president with the house as part of the salary, not a fringe benefit, says Mary Hudzikiewicz, community services director.

It comes in addition to the \$63,000 the president receives in wages and expenses. The University and the physical plant picks up the \$500-a-month tab for the heat, phone, electricity, cleaning service and maintenance.

It's a handsome offer, one that can help the University draw top-notch people to the post.

"I think it helps," says Charles Duncan, journalism professor emeritus and head of the presidential search committee.

Finding a place to live on short notice isn't an easy task, and having a comfortable and furnished place to offer an incoming president is an advantage, Duncan says.

Presidential homes are common in university circles, says Hudzikiewicz, whose job as assistant to vice president Curt Simic includes keeping an eye on the house and guiding tours.

Schools often give their top administrators homes or living stipends, she says. While a president is not required to live in the University-provided home, he receives no stipend otherwise.

Also provided with the four-floor home are works from the University art museum — interior decoration few homeowners could afford or rival.

The house's Tudor architecture is simple, its appointments understated but stately. Comfortable furnishings, simple brass handrails, large picture windows checkered in small, wood-framed panes, high ceilings and heavy doors — this old non-mansion recalls the days when less was more and gaudy design anathema.

Not that the place isn't impressive — or expensive. The house would fetch \$250,000-\$300,000 or more on



the market today, assuming a buyer could be found for a home with such a hefty price tag.

The University bought the house for \$15,000 in 1941, and George McMorran donated \$10,000 of the purchase price to the University.

There are dozens of rooms in the McMorran place — five full bathrooms, five bedrooms and a den with a terrace, a huge kitchen outfitted with a pair of stoves and a breakfast bar, a formal dining room, a breakfast room, a formal living room with an adjoining sun porch, a basement family room with a bar, a two-car garage.

It's a house worthy of a University president, worthy of University art pieces, worthy of guests like Gerald Ford and conductor Helmuth Rilling.

But today the works of art are gone, the house is empty and its furnished living quarters are void of the amenities that distinguish a home from a house.

Footsteps normally resound here in rooms with high ceilings, in halls with bare wood floors. But the echo is louder and mustier now as this mansion on the hill awaits its new occupant — the winner of the presidential sweepstakes who'll move in on July 1, 1981.

The McMorran House, at 2315 McMorran, hasn't had a president resident since Bill Boyd moved out in 1979 following his divorce near the end of his five-year tenure. As an acting president, Paul Olum doesn't have the option of living there.

In the interim the University asked a local couple to stay there for security purposes. They moved out when alumni director Vince Bilotta came to University this summer. He and his 14-year-old son are residing in two upstairs bedrooms until the rest of the family can join them in Eugene.

Entrepreneur McMorran built his home in 1923. Located in the stylish Fairmount neighborhood in southeast Eugene near Hendricks Park, the cream and gray mansion is a living chapter of University history. There's the extra room O. Meredith Wilson converted to a bedroom in the 1950s when he lived there with his large family. There's the room Bill Boyd converted to a den, where the erstwhile president must have paced and sweated over University revolutionaries and athletic scandals.

The first University president to move in was Donald Erb, who left the Collier House on East 13th and University in 1941. The Collier House then became the faculty club.

Erb was followed by Harry Newburn, Wilson, Arthur Flemming, Robert Clark and Boyd.

Boyd's successor is still several months away from selection, according to Duncan, who only would say that the committee has narrowed the list of applicants down "to a manageable number."

So while the search committee pares its list of potential presidents, the McMorran House waits empty, like a University motel, blinking its vacancy.