

TODAY'S WEATHER

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BUSINESS PAGE B-10

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NATION

It's over in Alaska. Lisa Murkowski was certified Thursday as the winner of the Senate race in Alaska, ending two months of legal wrangling over the seat she has held since 2002. Murkowski will become the first senator to be elected in a write-in campaign since Strom Thurmond in 1954. Joe Miller, a favorite of the tea party movement, won the GOP primary over Murkowski in August, forcing the incumbent to wage her successful write-in campaign.

BUSINESS

Good news on jobs. First-time applications for jobless benefits fell below a milestone level last week, heartening analysts even as they warned of the measure's volatility. **A-10**

NEW YEAR'S

Safety in Times Square. How will police manage to keep the annual celebration in New York City tonight safe for the nearly 1 million people who attend? Public safety experts say it's all about the precautions that aren't even visible to the happy crowds ushering in the new year. **A-8**

CORRECTIONS

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FINAL EDITION | 75 CENTS

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SYRACUSE
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 BOWL, 36-34

In its first bowl game since 2004, Syracuse University defeated Kansas State University in a back-and-forth thriller at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. The final twist was a referee's call of unimportant conduct against a Kansas State player who saluted after scoring a touchdown with just over one minute to play. The Wildcats then failed to tie the game on a two-point conversion from 18 yards out, giving Doug Marrone a bowl victory in his second year as coach of the resurgent Orange.

fans in photos, **B-6 & 7**

images2010 LIFE

Every day this week, The Post-Standard is publishing a selection of

NEW YORK

Rattner pays
 \$10M to settle

CNY

Kissing, down to
 a science

syracuse.com

Fantasy Land: Architect Andy Ramsgard and family have grand plans for Adirondack castle

Pam Lundborg By **Pam Lundborg**

on July 04, 2010



Courtesy Andy and Sherie Ramsgard

A sketch by architect Andy Ramsgard shows his intentions for the property in Tupper Lake.

Skaneateles architect Andy Ramsgard specializes in eccentric fantasies.

Normally, they are the fantasies of his millionaire clients: One wanted a labyrinth of underground tunnels stemming from his mansion. Another wanted his house to look like a yacht from the back and a lighthouse from the front.

But of all the strange houses Ramsgard has designed throughout the years, nothing can top the one he's building for himself: a 6,000-square-foot medieval castle -- made entirely of cinderblocks -- that was designed by an untrained, eccentric Adirondack introvert.

The castle is the creation of Ed Leary, a Tupper Lake probation officer who died in 2005. Known as a loner, Leary quietly bought 20 acres of property two miles outside of town. In 1985, he got permission from the Adirondack Park Agency to build a castle with a 65-foot tower turret; construction began in 1993.

For 12 years, Leary and close friend Jimmy Bombard lugged concrete blocks up the 20-acre property. With little outside help, they built the four-story castle by hand.

After Leary's death, the castle sat untouched until last October, when Ramsgard's wife,



Stephen D. Cannerelli / The Post-Standard

This is what the castle looked like in October when it was on the market.

Sherie, read a story about the property in The Post-Standard. The couple drove out to see the castle that week.

"I can look at a building and it will talk to me, like a painting talks to an art critic," Andy Ramsgard said. According to the Franklin County Clerk's Office, the couple paid \$150,000 for the property -- it was listed for \$180,000 -- and closed in March.

As part of the sale, Ramsgard was given Leary's drawings and writings about the castle.

Leary had kept meticulous records of the money he spent on materials and labor: exactly \$178,623.52. The sketches he made designing the project were far less precise: they look like cartoon drawings. On the back of them, he rambles about Nick Nolte's drinking and Bill Clinton's philandering.

Follow their progress

The Ramsgards will chronicle their work on the castle on a blog.

Read it at www.learycastle.blogspot.com.

Ramsgard called Leary's work, "brilliant," and said he's astonished at how architecturally advanced it is. "My architecture professors are

cringing, but I absolutely love that it is made out of concrete blocks," he said. "It's one of the least expensive and strongest construction material to work with."

Only about 30 percent of the work was done when Leary died of complications after surgery. His sister, Karen Watson, inherited the property and figured whoever bought it would raze the castle and develop the land. After all, her real estate agent, Rob Gillis, said contractors estimated it would cost more than \$1 million to finish the project professionally.

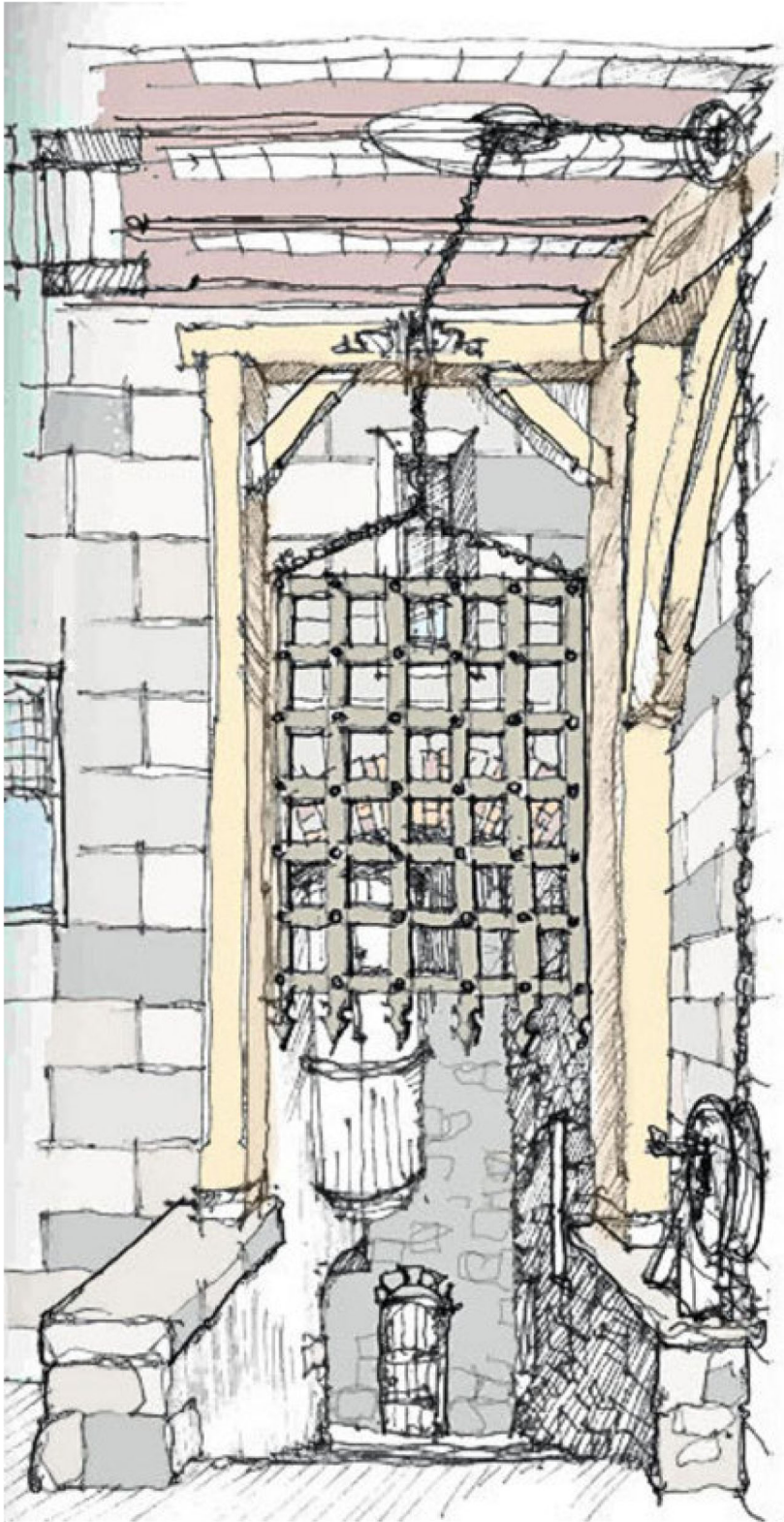
Ramsgard was undeterred by the challenge. To him, the fact that the castle is unfinished is "the best part. (Leary) did all of the heavy lifting. All the hard stuff is done."

He said the castle's engineering is incredible, especially considering Leary had no training. The only major error, he said, is a mathematical flaw in the design of the grand staircase. Ramsgard is compensating for the error by building a landing at the top of the stairs.

"It's not an uncommon math error," he said. "And the second (spiral) staircase is a very complicated piece of engineering, and he got that perfect."

The castle also is situated so that the view stretches 100 miles in every direction; another point of wonder to Ramsgard.

"It takes a complete career to figure out the placement of a building," Ramsgard said. "You never want to place a building at the top of a mountain because then you're just looking down. You want to place it just on the side of the mountain so that you get a complete understanding of the environment. And he got it right. What was in his head fascinates me."



Courtesy Andy Ramsgard

Here is an artist's rendering of what the finished entrance to Andy Ramsgard's medieval castle in the Adirondacks will look like.

Unlike Leary, who was building the castle as a fortress of solitude, Ramsgard said he wants his castle to host Gatsby-esque parties.

"This house is going to have lavish dinners and be used for weddings and charity events," he said. "I don't want to create a museum. I want to create a place people can live in and have fun."

Ramsgard said he plans to do all the work himself, relying on talented friends and associates in the business. He hopes to complete the work in about two years. The castle will mainly serve as a vacation home for the Ramsgard family and he plans to rent it out occasionally for guests.

More than anything, the evolving project is an excuse to spend time with his family.

"We can build a relationship with our kids while we build this together," he said, adding that his children Rex, 12, and Ruby, 9, talk about the castle constantly.

Ramsgard would not talk about how much money he plans to invest in the project but he wasn't shy about his building plans.

The lowest level, where Leary placed a cistern, will be made into a Renaissance-themed game room. There will be a pool table, chess tables and a movie screening area; there will be no television.

On the main floor, Ramsgard's close associate from Auburn, wood craftsman Matteo

Bartolotta, will hand-carve an ornate kitchen. The kitchen will lead to a library, with a wall of books. Pull the correct book and the wall will swivel to reveal a secret passage leading to a powder room.

From the main floor, guests also will be able to see the grand staircase. Because of Leary's math error, the staircase will be especially shallow at the bottom and lead to an elevated landing at the top.

A second staircase spirals to the upper floors, where there will be a 20-foot-high great room, with a walk-in fireplace lined with benches. Ramsgard is hand-crafting Gothic furniture to decorate the space. Much of the furniture, he said, will be 1970s castoffs from flea markets that can easily be repurposed into looking, "castle-y," he said.

King and queen's master suites will each consist of a large bedroom with a bathroom and a balcony overlooking the great room. The queen's room will also have a drawbridge at its entrance, should invaders try to capture her.

On the fourth floor are four more bedrooms, each with its own bathroom.

The roof will be outfitted with a wood-heated hot tub, a greenhouse and an outdoor fireplace. Guests can climb the 60-foot-high turret and look out over the 20-acre property.

"This is not a project I ever would have started," Ramsgard said. "I never would have gone into the woods to build a castle. But this story intrigued me. I may not get to write the ending, but I get to write the middle of it."

So, what's the moral of the story he's writing?

"When life gives you cinder blocks," he said, "you make a castle."

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