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Peer inside history

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OLYMPIA - Six historic Olympia houses will be on display today for the 2008 Holiday Tour of Historic Homes.

It's a chance for residents to get a peek - and a tour - inside houses they might pass every day.

Houses range from the Bigelow House - an 1850s Carpenter Gothic home said to be the city's oldest - to the Fleming/Longaker House, a relative newcomer built in 1932.

"We try not to repeat the same homes," said Karen Johnson, director of the Bigelow House Museum, which benefits from the \$15 donation asked of the people who take the holiday tour. But the Bigelow House always is on the tour, she added.

"We try to keep it to historic homes - homes that have something unique about them ... unique or significant," Johnson said.

She said visitors are welcome to tour the homes in any order they like, and see as many or as few as they want.

Most of the homes are on Olympia's local register of historic homes, something that comes with specific conditions.

"Maybe it's the best example of Victorian architecture in the city or maybe it was owned or built by an early mayor," Johnson said.

Residents of the homes either volunteer or are recruited to show, she said. Then volunteer docents study the history of the houses and offer the tours.

It's the first year for Stacey Waterman-Hoey's house, at least while she became an owner of the 1924 Dutch Colonial in 2003.

She said a neighbor's friendly and persistent persuasion prompted her to put it on the tour.

Waterman-Hoey said she has "just a love of older homes. They just have such a good feel, a solid feel about them that I don't see very often in newer homes."