

Between You and Me

[Metro Magazine](#)

[January 2009](#)

Bev Perdue Will Open Governor's Mansion To The People

By Carroll Leggett

When Governor-Elect Bev Perdue was presented with the Raleigh Junior League's plan for her inaugural weekend, she changed things about a bit. In her words, she wanted Saturday, Jan. 10, to be "the people's day all day." "I wanted to have the public swearing in and then the parade and then throw the doors of the Executive Mansion open in the afternoon and invite everyone to come and visit their house that they are going to let Bob and me live in." Consequently, the Inaugural Ball and other ticketed events usually held on Saturday night were rescheduled for Friday. Incidentally, she had high praise for the Junior League — who present the Inaugural Ball — as "wonderfully professional and efficient."

Thousands will show up on Blount Street to get a peek at the 1891 vintage Executive Mansion — one of the finest examples of Queen Anne style, Victorian, "gingerbread" architecture in America. Although plans were still in the making when we talked, the governor assured me there will be treats for kids, and well-wishers will be offered hot cider and cookies to make the inevitable wait more enjoyable.

I was last at the Mansion about a year ago, and it is thrilling to stand where so much history has been made, even if for just a few moments. Portraits of former governors are prominently displayed along with paintings by noted North Carolina artists. An impressive collection of Mansion china and glassware is displayed in cases in the spacious dining room. We owe a continuing debt of gratitude to Mrs. Dan K. Moore for her efforts while First Lady to spruce up the Mansion and furnish it appropriately. She had help from many generous North Carolinians, including her devoted friend Mary Semans of Durham.

It is going to be wonderful to have the lights burning brightly on Blount Street. By the time of the second Hunt administration, First Lady Carolyn Hunt had settled into life on the farm in Rock Ridge, NC, with children and grandchildren and a cattle operation and other family duties. Never particularly gregarious, her heart was there. The Easleys seemingly never warmed up to the Mansion and entertained infrequently.

"Bob and I love the Triangle, and we want to be a part of all it offers," she said. "And we want to stay involved in Chapel Hill." Bob Eaves, whom she describes as "a wonderful partner, husband and best friend," has put his Chapel Hill home, which he owned prior to their marriage, on the market, and the Grand Old Lady of Blount Street will be their primary residence. Collectively, she and Bob have five grandchildren with a sixth on the way. Family gatherings are sure to be spirited events. What fun it would be to ride a tricycle down the hall and play hide-and-seek in the downstairs public rooms.

During the campaign, Perdue promised residents of Western North Carolina that she would spend time at the Western Governor's Residence in Asheville and conduct business there. She stressed that, although she hails from Down East, she intends to be the governor of all North Carolina. "I also want to take the Council of State up there," she said. She also plans to open an office in Charlotte.

The Western Governor's Residence was a gift to the state of North Carolina from residents of the area decades ago. My friend and old lion of Western North Carolina politics, Wallace Hyde — husband of Ambassador Jeannette Hyde — was a member of the group that arranged it. They believed that by having a western residence, the governor would spend more time with them — and they would have more influence in state government circles. The 6000-square-foot stone-and-frame house, which is meticulously maintained by inmates of a state correctional facility, is of modern design, comfortable and has a spectacular view. However, governors have not spent much time there in the past.

Perdue's house on the Trent River in New Bern will be the family getaway. "It's on the water, and the kids love it." She says it doesn't get any better than sitting in a favorite rocking chair and looking out over the river.

During the campaign, husband Bob spent a lot of time at her side. A successful businessman, his personality and self-confidence will allow him to be North Carolina's first "First Husband" without being threatened by the notion. He clearly has a great fan in Perdue. "Bob came into our lives at an important time for my boys, who had lost their father. He has been a very stable influence and a role model for them. He is a source of strength for all of us." Bob loves college sports, so look for the first couple in the chancellor's box at games. He is a trustee at Meredith — "We have really come to love it," said the governor — and involved in other educational projects.



As of this writing, there has been much talk of First Dogs for the White House, but no one has inquired about First Dogs for the Blount Street Mansion. Well, I have the scoop. The new governor will bring with her Dos and Zipper, her Tibetan Terriers. Dos was a gift from Bob after she was elected lieutenant governor. Dos had puppies, and Zipper was the runt of the litter. They kept Zipper. I was briefly introduced to Dos and Zipper a few months ago at the Chapel Hill residence, but my guess is that they do not remember me. By nature, they are a bit boisterous — “watch dogs and barkers,” as the governor described them — and already the governor is thinking about how to contain their enthusiasm in their new digs. I wonder how long it will take for them to have the Highway Patrol officers manning the security desk eating from their hands ... uh, paws?

Perdue is passionate about making the Mansion a hub of activity and using the residence to full advantage to promote the state. That’s a happy thought. What a grand place to entertain and showcase North Carolina arts, crafts, culture, food and products. I am guessing that on any given day there may be bluegrass on the porch, chamber music in the entrance hall or a chorus on the staircase.

Is that Johnston County sweet potatoes I smell baking in the oven? Is that Junior Johnson’s country ham frying on the stove? **Pass me some of those Bertie County blistered peanuts please.** She wants to support North Carolina farmers by buying locally as much as possible and urging others to do the same.

When we talked, she already knew about the vegetable garden tucked away in the southeast corner of the Mansion grounds I wrote about in this column (Metro, January 2008). There is a scuppernong arbor there too, so if you are trying to wrangle an invitation to the Mansion, you may want to come in the fall when the grapes are ripe — or after there has been a frost on the collards, turning some of that starch to sugar. On a visit to the Executive Mansion during the last days of the Hunt administration, I espied pineapples growing beside the driveway. I was intrigued. They are not exactly native to the Old North State.

Perdue has an easy way with people, reads them well and enjoys listening. She said she particularly enjoyed the public sessions she held across the state as part of the transition process. She is going to be highly visible, and her schedule will be full. As for management style, “I am going to provide leadership and be very involved in decision making. I am going to be hands-on,” she added. She is serious about getting the state’s house in order. “Expect to see me dropping in unannounced.” Between you and me, I would not want to be playing solitaire on my state-owned laptop when the governor stops by.