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A Lack of Money

Samuel L. Clemens famously overspent when he built and furnished his eclectic "painted" brick home in Hartford, Conn., in 1874. That and some bad business investments forced Clemens and his family to leave their beloved home for Europe in 1891, never to return.

Ironically, the entity that owns and manages the Mark Twain House & Museum may soon be experiencing the same fate. Faced with what Executive Director Jeffrey L. Nichols described as "systemic" shortfalls that will total \$370,000 in 2008, the museum decided to take its financial crisis public earlier this summer.

The red ink started flowing in 2003, when the museum built a new 33,000-square-foot multi-purpose facility on the grounds at a cost that ballooned to \$19 million. All but \$4.9 million of that debt has been retired, but the real kicker is the operating budget—\$2.9 million this year.

Utility costs alone have increased 200 percent in recent years, almost all of it due to the Museum Center.

"We realize we overbuilt and overspent," says Nichols. Since early June, some sizeable donations have rolled in: \$50,000 from Hartford-based United Technologies, and a similar amount from the state of Connecticut. "So we've been able to close that gap," Nichols says. "We're trending in the right direction."

Nichols acknowledged that the museum must increase donations and work on a long-range plan to beef up its endowment—now a puny \$1.3 million. "The best way individuals can help is to visit the museum." The Mark Twain House & Museum, 351 Farmington Avenue, Hartford, CT, (860) 247-0998, marktwainhouse.org —MEP



BELOW: Twain wrote six books at his Hartford home, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. One of Twain's most disastrous investments was an early type-setting machine.



“The lack of money is the root of all evil.”
—Mark Twain, quoted in *More Maxims of Mark*, 1927



PROFILE

Charles Prowell is just at home writing about his travels in Pinochet's Chile as he is designing a new gate, painstakingly put together by trial and error. A long-time Bay area resident, Prowell hit on the idea of making gates and fence panels solely with tongue-and-groove joinery in the early 1990s. Despite years of experience in architecture, construction, and fine furniture design, fine-tuning the gates took some time, since gates don't expand and contract like indoor furniture. In the early years, "we did a lot of replacement gates," he says.

Thanks to web-driven business (his web site has been up since 1996), the company has expanded to Chicago, Portland, Oregon, and Raleigh, N.C. Prowell's method for establishing these satellites is a little unorthodox: "I came up with the idea of finding high-end furniture makers that were starving." Once craftsmen discovered they could make far more money building gates than furniture, it was easy to bring them on board. Prowell still designs all the gates himself, but leaves the construction to his talented artisans. "The truth is, they're better craftsmen than I am," he says. Prices for a basic cedar or cypress garden gate start at about \$1,400. Gate hardware and installation are up to the buyer; the company supplies a list of qualified installers and links to appropriate hardware makers. Charles Prowell Woodworks delivers to all 50 states; (800) 466-1850, prowellwoodworks.com —MEP

Although the prototype for Gate 203 was built in mahogany, gates are offered in cedar or cypress. "There's no reason for anyone to do a mahogany gate," Prowell says. "There's nothing that you wouldn't get with cedar."

