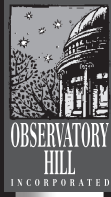


# OHI Journal

Observatory Hill Incorporated



The Newsletter for the Friends & Neighbors of Observatory Hill

Summer 2016

## REVITALIZATION PROJECTS ARE UNDERWAY

by Leslee Schaffer

More than two years ago, we began a process of working towards improving the quality of life in our neighborhood. A development company was formed, a team was assembled and we got to work by targeting both Bonvue Street and the business district for much needed improvements. We started acquiring abandoned and blighted properties in an effort to stabilize the area, to attract new businesses, to reduce crime and to provide affordable homeownership opportunities to those with even a modest income.

The first home we were able to purchase was an active drug house which had been foreclosed upon and sat vacant. Another purchase was an abandoned rental property which had been boarded up for almost a year. In our two year process, we were able to purchase three buildings and five houses. Mark Masterson of the Northside Community Development Fund started us off with predevelopment financing and this loan allowed us to begin purchasing houses and to secure an architect, VAF Architecture. Jon Huck, Real Estate Manager from the Northside Leadership Conference, headed up the project and got us going with meetings, treasurer's sales

and more meetings. He has guided us, helped us to choose a contractor and kept our budget on track. We

received a big boost of support from Mayor Bill Peduto and his staff. Meetings and conference calls were arranged and he offered assistance when we hit a financial hurdle.

At the March board meeting of the URA, our final piece of funding was approved for the rehabbing of our residential properties. They provided us with \$400,000 in loans and grants and an additional \$150,000 in deferred second mortgage loans which will keep these newly renovated houses affordable.

In the months ahead, we will watch as our architectural drawings come to life with new powder rooms, new kitchens and updated facades. In total, we have almost a million dollars being invested into Bonvue Street.

We are making steady progress in our commercial district. We have our timeline planned for the new restaurant so stay tuned to the next edition of the *OHI Journal* for some exciting updates.



*House drawings provided by VAF Architecture*



### What's Inside:



From Harris' Desk-2  
Schorr Bakery-2  
Animal Friends-2

House Tours Twist-2  
The Mayor's Office-3  
Northside Clean-3

Spotlight-4  
Calendar of Events-4  
Dear Neighbors-5

Heritage Day Fest-5  
New Board Members-6  
OHI Board-6

## FROM THE DESK OF DARLENE HARRIS



This year we will see some exciting improvements in Riverview Park. Major repairs are scheduled for the playground, including a new safety surface, and new and refurbished play equipment. Work is scheduled to begin this spring. As I've done for the past 10 years, I allocated funding for up to 9,000 flowers to be planted at the entrance to

the park. The Department of Public Works is seeking volunteers to help with the planting on May 17 at 8:00AM. They need all the help that they can get! Furthermore, the remainder of Riverview Ave. will be repaved.

Other streets in Observatory Hill including Bascom Ave. from Perrysville past Jacks Run, and Mt. Alister Rd. are scheduled to be repaved, starting in July. For more information on the city's paving program, visit <https://pap.accela.com/envista-public-web/index.xhtml?token=Pittsburgh>.

In March, I hosted #MoneyMattersPGH, a series of financial education seminars, which focused on a wide variety of topics including basic banking, first-time home buying, managing your credit, taxes, and how to protect yourself from fraud and identity theft. It is estimated that 10% of Pittsburgh families do not have any bank accounts, and many rely on costly check cashing, and payday lending services. I believe that financial literacy is important for the prosperity of our region, and Pittsburghers should know what resources are available to them. I'd like to thank all of the participants and our partners who made the program a great success.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to contact my office at **412.255.2135** or online at [www.pittsburghpa.gov/district1/feedback](http://www.pittsburghpa.gov/district1/feedback).

Darlene M. Harris  
Councilwoman

## Schorr Family Bakery Honored

Congratulations to the Schorr Family Bakery who received a proclamation from City Council to honor them for being in Observatory Hill for more than 40 years. The bakery was originally opened in 1973 by Thomas Schorr and has been a sweet asset to our neighborhood ever since. Here's to 40 more years!

## ANIMAL FRIENDS OFFERS ASSISTANCE

by Kaley Kaczynski

Animal Friends is reaching people and pets where they are. Animal Friends for Life (AFFL), a program of Animal Friends, is a community outreach-based program extending animal services, resources and information to underserved areas. By addressing the need for accessible, affordable pet care to communities hit hardest by economic and social challenges, we empower people. During 2016, AFFL will provide outreach to the Northside neighborhoods of Observatory Hill and Perry Hilltop. Through the building of relationships in the community, we will trap, spay/neuter 200 community (feral) cats FREE to residents. If you feed outdoor cats or see cats outdoors, please call Kaley Kaczynski at **412.865.9560** or [kkaczynski@thinkingoutsidethecage.org](mailto:kkaczynski@thinkingoutsidethecage.org)

## A New Twist for Observatory Hill House Tours

by Jeff Wagner

After some consideration, we have decided to change things up a bit this year and instead of the normal house tour, offer a history tour to showcase the community. The history tour will take place on July, 17 from 1pm to 5pm. History tours are gaining in popularity and just this year there will be a number that will feature Northside neighborhoods that have not previously had house or other kinds of tours. Also, by taking a year off from the traditional house tours that require a lot of work for both the board committee and the homeowners will allow us to build a solid stock of houses for the 2017 tour and introduce a new way to engage the community.

We plan to offer a walking tour of Riverview Avenue as well as a trolley tour of Observatory Hill more broadly. Beginning at Riverview United Presbyterian Church, we will be offering the walking tour and trolley tour continually. While people are waiting in between guides and trolleys, we will have food trucks and activities at the church, so there will always be something to do between 1:00 and 5:00 pm!

The tours will focus on history but we will also provide some pointers on architecture and the neighborhood in general. We will also talk about the many parts of the community that we will plan to feature next year including the business district development, house purchases and rehabilitation, and a few really special houses that we hope to see on the tour next year. So come join us on the 17th of July for our first ever history tour! And don't forget to keep an eye open of the other tours that the neighborhoods on the Northside will be offering.

## A Word From The Mayor's Office

Spring is coming to Pittsburgh! Although this winter was relatively mild, our excitement for warmer weather, outdoor activities, and a fast-approaching baseball season is not diminished. The Office of Mayor William Peduto would like to share some exciting news from the first few months of 2016 with our friends in Observatory Hill.

This year, we are very excited to celebrate the Bicentennial of Pittsburgh's incorporation as a City in 1816. Every Pittsburgher is invited to celebrate in this historic occasion. Please visit <http://pittsburghpa.gov/mayor/200-PGH/index.html> or call the Mayor's office at 412-255-2626 for more information on events and how to get involved!

On March 12, the U.S. Department of Transportation named Pittsburgh as one of seven finalists for the "Smart City Challenge," a federal competition that will award the winning city \$50 million to build technology-based systems to address transportation challenges. Pittsburgh's proposal, developed in partnership with Allegheny County, Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh, the Port Authority and other stakeholders, would make our city a model for data-driven transportation for the nation. Nearly 80 cities applied and the final winner will be announced in June.

On national "311 Day" (3/11), Mayor Peduto and the Department of Innovation & Performance unveiled a new app that will improve both customer service for Pittsburgh residents and efficiency for 311 operators and other city workers. The "MyBurgh" app connects mobile users directly with 311 services. MyBurgh allows users to capture the locations of their service requests via GPS and track the progress of those requests; the app also includes City news, contact information, refuse pick-up information, and seasonal tools such as the snow plow tracker.

Finally, the City is fortunate to have a 25-year FBI veteran and former Pittsburgh Paramedic returning to Pittsburgh as our newest Public Safety Director. Wendell Hissrich has spent the past quarter century at the FBI overseeing joint law enforcement services with public service agencies throughout the nation. Director Hissrich started his public safety career in Pittsburgh as a paramedic and crew chief for five years. He is also a life member of the Forest Hills Volunteer Fire Department. Director Hissrich was confirmed by City Council on February 9.



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## Northside Keeps It Clean

by Mary Kate Ranaii and Samantha Weaver

The Pennsylvania Resources Council and Allegheny CleanWays are working right now to fight litter and increase recycling in all of the Northside neighborhoods. Funded by the Buhl Foundation, these two organizations are implementing a multi-tied campaign to solve these problems, fondly named "Northside Keeps It Clean."

Litter poses huge threats to our environment, wildlife and to public health. Roadside litter causes traffic accidents, can injure children, pets, and wildlife and poses as fire hazards. To add insult to injury, communities and government entities spend millions of taxpayer dollars to clean up litter. In a recent survey of Northside residents, 51 percent of locals reported litter as a pressing issue.

The Northside Keeps It Clean campaign involves a combination of education, prevention and cleanups. We are working to educate every 5th grade student in the Northside about the impacts of litter. To prevent litter from happening, we are also working to install public space containers and distribute residential recycling bins to give these materials a home that is not on the side of the road. Furthermore, we are working to support existing community litter cleanups and to "bust" illegal dumpsites.

DumpBusters is a program run by Allegheny CleanWays that tackles illegal land-based dumpsites. A DumpBuster crew goes out somewhere in the city nearly every day (weather permitting). The Northside is one of the current areas of focus and to start this campaign seven Northside neighborhoods were surveyed for illegal dumping in September 2015. Since then, DumpBusters staff and volunteers have cleaned up 64 tons of debris and slightly more than 1000 tires in the Northside! Dumpsite cleanups have taken place mostly in Perry Hilltop and Troy Hill so far, but these totals also include efforts in Observatory Hill, Spring Hill, Summer Hill, Spring Garden, Brighton Heights and Fineview.

We need your help to fight litter and to increase recycling in Observatory Hill! Volunteer with Allegheny CleanWays' DumpBusters program, organize a community litter cleanup, volunteer to help at a recycling bin distribution event and pick up a recycling bin for your home at the same time. We still need volunteers, so contact us with any inquiries at [samantha.weaver@alleghenycleanways.org](mailto:samantha.weaver@alleghenycleanways.org) or call 412-381-1301. We also provide gloves, bags, rakes, etc. for any community litter cleanups. Find more information about the Northside Keeps It Clean campaign at [www.prc.org/one-clean-northside](http://www.prc.org/one-clean-northside).

# Spotlight on Riverview Park

by Leslee Schaffer

Covering 287 acres, Riverview Park is commonly referred to as the jewel of Observatory Hill. Originally this land was owned by Sam Watson and was known as Watson Farms. In 1894, the residents of Allegheny City along with Mayor William Kennedy pooled their money to purchase the property. It was then donated to the City of Allegheny. It is hard to imagine that the now beautiful chapel shelter was once so neglected and the degree of deterioration so bad that it was closed down in 2005. The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, along with the city and droves of volunteers, took on this project. Fundraising had already begun. A couple of years and more than a million dollars later, the building was restored in 2008. This shelter was originally Watson Memorial Presbyterian Church. By the late 1800s, its congregation had outgrown the space and it was moved on skids and rollers to the park. A larger church was built and is the present day Riverview United Presbyterian Church.

In recent months, focus on improvements to the park has begun. The road to the Allegheny Observatory has been repaved along with parking lot improvements and new lighting. In addition, plans to replace both the playground equipment and the surface are underway. An exciting new addition to Riverview is Park Ranger, Nancy Schaefer. While chatting with Nancy in a quiet corner of the Visitor's Center, her excitement and passion for her work were obvious. A neighborhood resident since 1983, Nancy



spoke with pride of her 10-year career with the Northside Leadership Conference. Her professional background also includes work with the Girl Scouts and the Student Conservation Association. Current work at Riverview brings back many fond memories of working with Moses Carper, former president of OHI. By supporting the OHI Park Committee and Mr. Moses, this led to the reopening of the Visitor's Center, the creation of numerous gardens and the organizing of Heritage Day. Ms. Schaefer became so familiar with the park because of the time they spent working there, that it seemed only natural to apply for the job opening on the city's website. She could not believe her good fortune when she was hired. "This is a beautiful park," she says with a smile. As a ranger, she spends her days patrolling the park and she states that she can issue citations for certain rule violations. Dogs are required to be on leashes when not inside one of the two off-leash areas

above the Observatory. Schaefer adds, "Also, please no littering, no smoking on park grounds and clean up after your pets." These rules are for both "the health and the safety of everyone." Seeing Riverview utilized by more people is the goal of Citiparks and they will appreciate hearing the community's suggestions and ideas. Ranger Schaefer can be reached at **412.616.0383** or at [nancy.schaefer@pittsburgh.pa.gov](mailto:nancy.schaefer@pittsburgh.pa.gov). Better yet, stop by and check out the park's many improvements, greet our new park ranger and enjoy this lovely jewel in our own backyard.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**June 10: Riverview Park 5K Race and Fitness Walk** begins at 7pm with the kick-off of the Heritage Festival.

**June 11: Heritage Day Weekend** continues at Riverview Park from Noon to 4pm. A variety of festival activities and exhibits which include fun for all ages.

**June 11 – August 27: Stars at Riverview Jazz Series and Cinema in the Park** runs each Saturday throughout the summer. Concert begins at 7pm followed by a movie at dusk. Bring a lawn chair or a blanket and enjoy music and movies under the stars.

**June 15: Monthly OHI Board Meeting** at 7pm at the Byzantine Seminary 3605 Perrysville Avenue. All are welcome to attend.

**June 16: Northside Leadership Annual Scholarship & Awards Dinner.** This 33rd annual dinner will honor the outstanding students, businesses and neighborhood volunteers who make our community great.

**July 17: The Observatory Hill History and Architecture Tour:** both a walking and a riding tour with Molly's Trolleys. Join us as local historians share some fascinating history from our own back yard.

**July 20: Monthly OHI Board Meeting** at 7pm at the Byzantine Seminary 3605 Perrysville Avenue. All are welcome to attend.

**August 2: National Night Out** – Family events throughout the neighborhood. Check Nextdoor.com for an event near you or call 412.736.2489 for more information.

**August 17: Monthly OHI Board Meeting** at 7pm at the Byzantine Seminary 3605 Perrysville Avenue. All are welcome to attend.

**September 23: Save the Date** for the annual Fall Spaghetti Dinner and Family Night. Held in the activities building of Riverview Park from 5pm – 8pm. Food, music, prizes and fun!

## DEAR NEIGHBORS

Observatory Hill, Inc. is made up of a diverse team of volunteers. We live from one end of the neighborhood to the other in different types of homes. We make up a wide variety of careers, backgrounds, and opinions. One major trait we have in common is a love of our neighborhood, and it shows in what we have accomplished in 2015. OHI has:

- Purchased five homes on Bonvue Street and are in the process of remodeling them for sale with an eye toward improving the quality of life in our neighborhood.
- Purchased three buildings in the business district of our neighborhood on Perrysville Avenue with the intent to rehab and lease to businesses that will revitalize our neighborhood.
- Applied for and received a \$10,000 grant from the Sprout Fund to help revitalize the business district.
- Installed a new security camera in the business district. This camera will be able to be accessed by the Pittsburgh Police to help solve crimes.
- Conducted a very successful house tour in which 12 homes and buildings in our neighborhood were put on the stage to help promote our neighborhood.
- Hosted our annual spaghetti dinner in Riverview Park to bring the neighborhood together and celebrate the fall season.
- Continued our quest to have more street trees planted in our neighborhood. A part of this effort includes the replacement of several areas of sidewalks and curbs.
- Maintained our Facebook page, email notification, and quarterly newsletter to keep the neighborhood informed.
- Conducted our open monthly meetings and included several guest speakers bringing topics of interest to the neighborhood.
- Continued to act as a liaison to our city government for neighbors with unique or unresolved issues.
- Represented our neighborhood at zoning hearings, court proceedings, and other public meetings to protect our neighbors.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the members of our Board and the many neighborhood volunteers who helped us achieve these accomplishments this year. We welcome everyone in the neighborhood to attend our meetings and get involved – let's make Observatory Hill an even better place next year!

Glenn Miller, President  
Observatory Hill, Inc.

## 5K Run and Fitness Walk/ Heritage Day Festival

by Dorrie Smith

Citiparks in partnership with Observatory Hill Inc. will kick off their 9th summer season with Riverview Park's 5K Run and Fitness Walk at 7pm Friday June 10 and Heritage Day Festival June 11 from 12:00 – 4:00pm in Riverview Park.

Heritage Day Festival begins the Stars at Riverview Summer Concerts and Movies Series. Families can enjoy a day of frontier exploration, Native American snacks, totem pole painting, and various crafts. Stop by the Observatory Hill Inc.'s booth to meet the newest OHI's Board of Directors and see what's new and happening in Observatory Hill. New this year, we are excited to have The Allegheny City Historic Gallery joining the Festival. Stop by their booth to get a historic yesteryear look at Old Allegheny City and Observatory Hill. Also new this year is a Chili Cook-off. Returning vendors include the Roving Art Cart, Summer Soul Line Dancing with Roland Ford and live jazz. Our traditional attractions include Arts in the Park, Venture Outdoors Bike Rodeo, Petting Zoo, Pony Rides, our favorite animal pals from the Animal Rescue League, the Humane Society and more will also be returning.



The Heritage Day Festival features more than 30 non-profit groups providing hands-on family activities. City of Pittsburgh Public Safety Dept. features their EMS, Bomb Squad and Police K9 Unit. Check out Allegheny General with on-site health consultations and free tours at The Observatory from 1 – 3:00pm Enjoy a free hot dog, baked bean lunch from 1:30 – 2:30pm Gather your families, friends and join your neighbors across the Northside for a weekend of community fun for all ages inside beautiful Riverview Park in Observatory Hill.

If you would like to volunteer your services for either event, please contact Dorrie Smith OHI Board Member and Chairperson for The Heritage Day Festival at **412-877-4828** or email her **4dsmigroup@gmail.com**. Rain or Shine event!

## OHI WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBERS

This year we welcome our two newest board members, Marlee Gallagher and Michael Payne. We had a record number of applicants and are glad to have our board fully staffed.

Marlee currently works for the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation and her experience with nonprofit fundraising and marketing are a big plus for our board. As a longtime admirer of our neighborhood, she finally made the move to purchasing a home here.



Michael was a long time resident of Observatory Hill and is currently the sole proprietor of M&A Tax, Accounting and Notary Services on Baytree Street. He has been actively attending our meetings and has dived into our efforts of revitalizing our business district.



# OHI Journal

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