

OHI Journal

Newsletter for the Friends and Neighbors of Observatory Hill

Summer 2019

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS



Observatory Hill Development Corporation has purchased a fifth house on Bonvue Street as part of Phase Two of the

revitalization project – making ten homes in total which were purchased by the organization. Phase One is completed and the first set of five homes were revitalized and sold to homeowners last year. 127 Bonvue Street was purchased for \$60,000. It already had some work done so it is expected that the rehabbing will not be as costly. This home is located in a section of row houses which have been blighted for many years attracting vandalism and mischief. Finally ridding the street of this long-time blight is very good news indeed.

Members of the Mayor's office along with traffic engineers met with us to tour our projects and the five points intersection where Perrysville, Baytree, East Street and Mairdale meet. There was a general consensus that there are traffic issues and at times driver confusion over the traffic patterns. They will propose some new lane striping to improve the safety and function and we will meet again to discuss the proposals.

In January, the Urban Development Authority approved Housing Opportunity Fund and Housing Loans be granted to the Observatory Hill Development Corporation for the Five Points Project which includes the renovation of three properties in the commercial district. 3917, 3923 and 3925 Perrysville Avenue are being renovated for both commercial and residential use. Two of the apartments will be rented to households with incomes at or below 31% of the area median income and the other four apartments will be rented to households with incomes at or below 50% of the area median income. Thank you to the URA!

Progress continues on these three Perrysville Avenue properties. In February, a clean out crew emptied out all remaining contents and then selective interior demo was performed to open up walls and ceilings to eliminate surprises. Our mechanical systems engineer then worked with our architect to update drawings to add the changes made to the HVAC, electric and plumbing. An updated bid was then crafted to include all our funding sources and there are three contractors interested and the next step: construction!



Apartments above Mr. Bill's

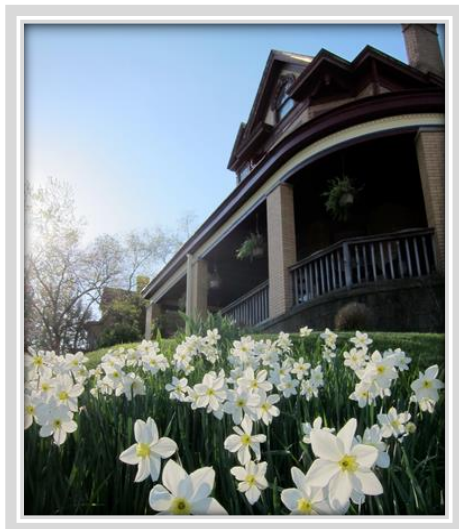
Mark your calendar:

The Five Points Business District Committee will again host community flea markets in the parking lot at Perry High School this summer. If you would like a table to sell your wares, contact info@fivepointsbdohill.com or call 412.509.8408. Flea markets will run from 9am to 2pm on Sundays, June 23 and July 21. Proceeds benefit the annual light up night event.

Observatory Hill House Tour Set for June 2

Discounted tickets are on sale now at observatoryhill.net

By Marlee Gallagher



During the first quarter of the 20th Century, H.C. Mendell Co. of East Ohio Street developed *Marshall Fields*, a small tract of land in Observatory Hill that offered tree-lined streets, easy access to the city, plentiful space for large homes and gardens, and views of nearby Riverview Park. In an ad to promote the community, H.C. Mendell described it as “a site surrounded by magnificent homes... and the most beautiful and untouched of city parks at its door... Nature’s best for rest, refinement, and a home.”

Today, this area of the neighborhood is known as Acorn Hill and will be featured on this year’s tour: *Observatory Hill in a Nut Shell*. From quaint park side cottages to fully restored turn-of-the-century homes, lush gardens, and neighborhood landmarks, this year’s tour includes 10 main stops, with other points of interest along the way.

Putting the house tour together is a challenge every year, and this year was no exception,” said Jeff Wagner, House Tour Committee Chair. “But with the support of our neighborhood, it always comes together. We’re pleased and excited about what we have to offer on the tour this year.”

One such offering is a renovated grand Victorian. This stately home, located along Judge’s Row, has been completely transformed into an expertly curated collection of pop culture, sports memorabilia, and art, making it a truly one-of-a-kind family home. Previously featured in 2009, there have been many new and exciting additions made to this must-see home over the past decade. Of course, while the friendly neighbors, historic homes, and unique location truly set the Observatory Hill House Tour apart, the event would not be complete without local craft beer, spirit, and cider tastings at key stops along the self-guided tour route. Tour goers might even catch some surprising local entertainment as they meander through the neighborhood!

Over the years, the house tours have brought thousands of people to the neighborhood, raising critical funds for Observatory Hill, Inc. Last year’s tour, organized and managed by an all-volunteer team, engaged over 600 tour goers.

Don’t miss out on this year’s tour! Join your friends and neighbors for this special community event.

Observatory Hill in a Nutshell Annual House Tour

- Sunday, June 2 from 12-5 p.m.
- Register at Riverview United Presbyterian Church – 3505 Perrysville Ave.
- \$18 advance/\$20 day-of

Buy advance tickets now at www.observatoryhill.net or call 412.736.2489 for more information.

All event proceeds benefit Observatory Hill, Inc.

FROM THE DESK OF DARLENE HARRIS



Hello Northsiders! I hope everyone is having a wonderful spring and is ready for the summer to come. As the weather continues to get warmer, take the time to enjoy it outside at the local parks and even make your way down to some Pittsburgh Pirates baseball games!

Our staff is still hard at work at the City-County Building. Road pavings have begun and will continue throughout the summer, so the roads should begin to improve shortly. Be sure to check for road closings and detours. Through the excitement of the newly paved roads, please be careful when driving around the neighborhoods. Children will be outside enjoying the nice weather and animals will be out and about. We want everyone to be safe! Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at 412-255-2135 or darlene.harris@pittsburghpa.gov.

Darlene M. Harris
Councilwoman, District 1

JoAnn Pomietto Chosen as Neighbor of the Year



JoAnn Pomietto and her husband, Ken, have lived in Observatory Hill since 1976. It was to be their “starter” home! But it became their long time home where they raised their three children. JoAnn has been involved with many OHI activities over the years: House Tours, delivering welcome packages to new neighbors, spaghetti dinners, Riverview Park 5K races and Heritage Days. JoAnn was co-chairperson of the annual OHI House Tour in 2012 and in 2013. Two years ago she became OHI’s representative on the Northside Public Safety Council and is now the Secretary of the council. She keeps OHI informed of all activities on the Northside by regularly attending meetings and keeping the lines of communication open. She likes to know her neighbors and has organized two National Night Out events on Bascom Street.

JoAnn also volunteers at Riverview Presbyterian Home with her cousin (Miki) and Miki’s therapy dog, Titanium. The residents just love seeing Titanium, a long hair German Shephard! JoAnn also volunteers at Alverno High-rise, in Millvale, where she grew up. She teaches and mentors the seniors in computers and smart phones. Bringing the seniors into the 21st Century is heartwarming.

JoAnn is a member of Incarnation Parish and was an active member of their Women’s Guild before it dissolved.

JoAnn plans on remaining on the Northside where she has made many friends. Observatory Hill is proud to have JoAnn as our 2019 Neighbor of the Year and we are thankful for the many hours she has devoted to making our neighborhood a better place.



CONSERVATORSHIP GRANTED

By Leslee Schaffer

Last year, Observatory Hill Development Corporation applied for a conservatorship for the Lamb of God Lion of Judah Church building and for the apartments next door.

The Blighted and Abandoned Conservatorship Act was enacted in 2008 to deal with serious cases of property neglect. The guidelines state: "Neglected properties destabilize residential communities; when they appear, nearby property owners start thinking about moving out. Because such properties have the potential to become centers of criminal activity, their presence makes a community less safe and increases the cost of police and fire services. A deteriorated or vacant property is a symptom of declining or failing real estate - and when no one takes action to improve its condition or status, market conditions begin to worsen and threats to community well-being increase."

Over the years, both nearby businesses and homeowners have expressed concern over the blighted and unsafe conditions of the property. After the buildings became abandoned and the apartments condemned, our board of directors felt that no one would take on a project of this size and scope and that it was not an option to watch these feature buildings with such rich history continue to deteriorate in our heavily traveled corridor. In addition, the board believes that the blight would work against the nearby revitalization efforts and would deter future investment thus working against the goals we are trying to achieve.

Over the last year, we saw vandalism, graffiti, extensive overgrowth and two fires in the apartment buildings. After considering all these factors, our development corporation moved forward with hopes of bringing these buildings back to life.

Evidence was collected – some of which included photos, fire department reports, building inspection violations and housing court dockets. It was presented to Judge Walko, who then had to decide if our corporation would be able to take charge of the abandoned property. A number of conditions had to be met including several blight indicators such as: the building is a public nuisance in need of substantial rehabilitation; the property is unsuitable for habitation or use, the dilapidated appearance and condition negatively affects the economic well-being of residents and businesses nearby. Overwhelming documentation pointed to extensive damage and blight so Judge Walko easily ruled in our favor and granted a conservatorship.

In the days ahead, we will be assessing the conditions of the structures to determine a course of action. Initial plans are to stabilize the buildings, address holes in the roofs, have an engineer make an assessment of the damaged apartments and draft cost work ups.

While this revitalization is a daunting and costly project, we believe it is a necessary one and we envision great potential. We ask for your support. There are now three multimillion-dollar revitalization projects all at the same time. How can you help? Get on our volunteer list to pick up trash and to mow and weed. Be additional eyes and ears on the street and report mischief to the authorities. We are excited for the future of our neighborhood and we invite you to join us as we strive to make Observatory Hill an even better place to live and work.





A WORD FROM THE MAYOR'S OFFICE

The Office of Mayor William Peduto would like to share some exciting news with our friends in Observatory Hill.

Get Your City of Pittsburgh Tax Receipt with Pittsburgh's Online Public Budget Tool: City of Pittsburgh taxpayers can see where their local taxes go by using the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)'s online public budget tool Balancing Act. This tool provides transparent information about the city's budgets and allows the community to submit feedback that will inform next year's budgets.

Balancing Act Link: <http://pittsburghpa.gov/omb/budget-tax-receipt-simulation>

Balancing Act gives taxpayers an opportunity to see what their tax money is spent on, understand the Capital and Operating budgets, change spending allocations, and leave comments. Tax Receipt – Enter your income and the value of any property you own in the City of Pittsburgh to receive an itemized receipt of what your taxes pay for. Link: <http://pittsburgh-tr.v1.abalancingact.com/taxreceipt>

Capital Budget Simulator – Explore how your tax dollars are distributed amongst departments and projects, see detailed explanations for spending items and add your changes and comments.

Link: <https://pittsburgh.abalancingact.com/city-of-pittsburgh-2019-capital-budget>

Operating Budget Simulator – Try your hand at managing the city's books and operating expenses.

Link: <https://pittsburgh.abalancingact.com/city-of-pittsburgh-2019-operating-budget>

After creating their own budgets, users can submit them and they will be reviewed by OMB, the Office of Mayor William Peduto, City Council and City Departments for the development of the 2020 budgets. This is the second year that OMB has used the online program to supplement feedback gathered at their two annual public capital budget forums to be held this summer. To be notified of the capital budget forums, sign up for the Office of Community Affairs' newsletter at newsletter.pittsburghpa.gov.

URA Housing Opportunity Fund: The Housing Opportunity Fund strives to make Pittsburgh a more diverse, vibrant city that is affordable to all. The Housing Opportunity Fund (HOF) supports the development and preservation of affordable and accessible housing within the City of Pittsburgh. More information is available at <https://www.ura.org/pages/housing-opportunity-fund-programs> or by contacting HOF Community Outreach Specialist Vethina Hage at (412)-255-6639, or email at vhage@ura.org.

Programs Include:

- **Rental Gap Program** - Rental Gap Program (RGP) loans are available to developers for the creation and/or preservation of affordable units
- **Down Payment and Closing Cost Assistance Program** - The Down Payment and Closing Cost Assistance Program (DPCCAP) provides financing to first-time homebuyers in the City of Pittsburgh.
- **Homeowner Assistance Program** - The Homeowner Assistance Program (HAP) provides financial and technical assistance to eligible homeowners for rehabilitating and improving residential owner-occupied properties within the City of Pittsburgh.
- **Housing Stabilization Program** - Through service providers, this program provides short term (up to 1 year) of rental assistance to households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- **Affordable For-sale Housing Program** - This program supports developers to renovate or construct quality homes for first-time homebuyers.

To keep up with what's happening with the City, feel free to follow us online and on social media!

- **Monthly Newsletter:** newsletter.pittsburghpa.gov
- **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/ocapgh/>
- **Twitter:** @CityPGH & @OCAPGH
- **Nextdoor:** Public Agency: Community Affairs

JANE AND RICH SESTRIC TO RECEIVE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Rich and Jane met shortly after he graduated from Point Park while she was a sophomore at Carlow. They were married in 1971 and now have four grown daughters and six grandchildren. During their early married life, they worked to improve the community for the sake of their children and joined in festivals, block parties and park programs with their daughter

To combat crime and poor housing code enforcement on their street, they joined other neighbors and began the Richey Avenue Block Club. While in the Club, several of the neighbors wanted to see an improvement in housing, focusing on restoration of the original character of the homes. They were also concerned that the business district was not thriving. Maintenance and programming at Riverview Park seemed to be in demand too, with fewer programs here than other regional parks. These three concerns led them to form a nonprofit corporation called Preservation North in June of 1982 which was later renamed Observatory Hill, Incorporated in 1986. City planners and The Neighborhoods for Living Center helped in the process of organizing business district owners (led by Andy Balint and Bill Schmidt) and promoting the community as a convenient, family friendly community. One of their primary goals was to cooperate with city officials and departments to gain adequate services for the community, including housing code enforcement and Riverview Park development.

Rich and friends represented the community in Northside wide organizations such as the Northside Leadership Conference, The Community Reinvestment Group, the Northside Public Safety Council and NeighborFair. He worked with the Northside Leadership Conference to gather information on housing as the Conference completed a Needs Assessment and long-range development plan in 2004. He felt a strong tie to the entire Northside, being born at home, 1043 Peralta Street, before the East Street Expressway took his childhood home.

Both Rich and Jane are enthusiastic neighbors for the Northside and for Observatory Hill. Rich is an outgoing guy who spent evenings chatting and visiting with neighbors, while Jane focused on communications through the newsletter. She was editor and frequent writer for the OHI Journal for almost 30 years and was active on the House Tour Committee for over 20 years. In the mid-nineties, the Sestricks opened their own home on Richey Avenue for the Observatory House Tour. Jane and Rich attended the NSLC Education Committee meetings and lobbied for quality schools across the Northside as a way of attracting and retaining families. Two of their grandchildren attend Allegheny Traditional Academy Elementary, where Rich's sister Patricia graduated from High School.

Rich and Jane had a blast working with neighbors on Spaghetti Dinners, the Riverview Park Heritage Day and neighborhood projects such as the House Tour and Riverview Heritage Days, but know all the progress the community enjoys is powered by the energy and talents of hundreds of people who care and put that care into action.

Once referred to as 'the spark plugs' of the neighborhood, they leave a legacy that will last for years to come. As two of the original founders of our nonprofit, we thank them for their vision and for their many years of service to the north side. Observatory Hill Incorporated is proud to have Rich and Jane as our award winners!



The Sestricks will be receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual awards dinner hosted by the Northside Leadership Conference to be held at the Priory Grand Hall on Thursday evening, June 13. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres are served beginning at 6pm and dinner begins at 7pm followed by the award ceremony.

Tickets must be purchased in advance by calling Kelly MacKay at 412.231.4714 or by emailing: kelly@pittsburghnorthside.com

Fun for All Ages: Annual Heritage Day Festival at Riverview Park

By Dorrie Smith



Citiparks in partnership with Northside Leadership Conference will kick off the summer season with Riverview Park's 13th Annual 5K Run and Fitness Walk at 7:00 p.m. Friday June 7th and the Heritage Day Festival June 8th from Noon to 4:00 p.m. in beautiful Riverview Park in Observatory Hill (Upper Northside).

Friday, June 7th – Enjoy an evening run through forested Riverview Park at 7:00 p.m. at the Riverview Activities Building. If you have not done so already, you can register on-line at www.riverview5k.com or the day of the race. The 5K race is sponsored by Northside Leadership Conference, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Allegheny Health Network, Dollar Bank, Froggy Radio/Willie 103.5, Wise Snacks and ARAD.

Saturday, June 8th - Heritage Day Festival kicks off the Stars at Riverview Summer Concerts and Movie Series. Families can enjoy a day of frontier exploration, Native American snacks, totem pole painting and various crafts. Want jazz in the afternoon? No need to wait for the evening – come out and enjoy the cool sounds of Lee Robinson & ISKA from 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm. Also returning, the Roving Art Cart and Citiparks Summer Line Dancing with Roland Ford. Our traditional attractions such as Arts in the Park, Venture Outdoors Bike Rodeo, Animal Friends, Carnegie Science Center, Jumping Jumperoo Bounce House and others will also be returning.

Heritage Day Festival features more than 20 non-profit groups providing hands-on family fun activities. The City of Pittsburgh Public Safety Dept. features their EMS, Bomb Squad and Police K9 Unit. Check out FREE on-site health consultations in The Visitor Center and tours at The Allegheny Observatory from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Enjoy a FREE Hot Dog picnic style lunch from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. What better way to enjoy a weekend in beautiful Riverview Park with family and friends. If you would like to volunteer for this event, please contact Dorrie Smith, Event Chairperson for Heritage Day Festival at 412-877-4828 or 4dsmigroup@gmail.com. **THIS IS A RAIN OR SHINE EVENT.**

GARVIN FIELD DAY

Our Observatory Hill neighbor, Bonny Kwolek, applied for and received a \$1,000 grant from One Northside to make improvements to Garvin Field. So please join us as we work together to pick up trash, to paint, to weed and to pretty up. Afterwards, we will gather on the field for games, food and fun.

When: Saturday, May 18

Where: Garvin Field off Franklin Rd

Time: 10am to 2pm



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 18: Garvin Field Day: Meet at Garvin Field from 10am to 2pm for a clean-up followed by food and fun.

June 1: Neighborhood Clean Up: Join us from 10am to Noon on Saturday, June 1st to pick up trash. Meet in the parking lot across from Schorr's Bakery. Tools, gloves and bags are provided.

June 2: Observatory Hill House Tour from Noon to 5pm. Ticket tables are located on the lawn of the Riverview United Presbyterian Church. Annual house tour benefits and showcases our unique neighborhood.

June 7: Riverview Park 5K Race and Fitness Walk begins at 7pm. Registration begins at 5pm in the activities building.

June 8: Heritage Day Festival continues at Riverview Park from Noon to 4pm. A variety of festival activities and exhibits include fun for all ages.

June 8 – August 24: Stars at Riverview Jazz Series and Cinema in the Park runs each Saturday through 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 13: Northside Leadership Annual Scholarship & Awards Dinner held at the Grand Hall. This annual dinner will honor the outstanding students, businesses and neighborhood volunteers who make our community great.

June 19: Monthly OHI Board Meeting at 7pm at the Byzantine Seminary 3605 Perrysville Avenue. All are welcome to attend.

June 23: Community Flea Market to be held in the Perry High School parking lot from Noon to 2pm.

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

July 21: Community Flea Market to be held in the Perry High School parking lot from Noon to 2pm.

August 21: Monthly OHI Board Meeting at 7pm at the Byzantine Seminary 3605 Perrysville Avenue. All are welcome to attend.