

OHI Journal

Observatory Hill Incorporated

The Newsletter for the Friends & Neighbors of Observatory Hill

Winter 2016 — 2017

OHI CELEBRATES BONVUE STREET GROUND BREAKING

by Leslee Schaffer

On a sunny day in November, Bonvue Street homeowners and members of the OHI board gathered with city and county leaders including Mayor Bill Peduto, Councilwoman Darlene Harris and Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald to celebrate the ground breaking of the Bonvue Street Revitalization Project. This project was made possible due to the financing provided by the URA, the Slovak Savings Bank and the Northside Community Development Fund. All five houses were opened up for touring and the architectural drawings were on display. Our contractors have been busy working – gutting kitchens, replacing roofs, tearing down walls to add first floor powder rooms and removing vinyl siding to expose the original façade to be restored. This is an exciting time for our Observatory Hill neighborhood and to all those who have worked to make this day possible – we say thank you.



If you or someone you know is interested in purchasing one of these soon-to-be restored homes, contact Jon Huck at **412.231.4714** ext 205. Houses are now on sale. Request a tour and pick your finishes.

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FROM THE DESK OF DARLENE HARRIS



Happy New Year, Observatory Hill! I hope everyone enjoyed taking a break from work and school for the holidays. The few days I took off to spend with my family were relaxing and refreshing, and this year promises to be extremely productive. Currently, we have plans to introduce legislation dealing with the well-being

of exotic animals housed in Pittsburgh

homes, and we have many other projects underway.

I would like to remind everyone to please be careful while driving, as the harsh month ahead of us promises to bring snow and ice. Beware of black ice, and please look out for children as school is back in session. For those of us seeking good spots for winter sledding and sports, Observatory Hill is a wonderful place for a family outing. Enjoy the winter weather, and always feel free to contact me at darlene.harris@pittsburghpa.gov or **412-255-2135**.

Darlene M. Harris
Councilwoman, District 1

OHI Board Member Changes

Join us in welcoming our newest board member, Matthias Sundberg. Matthias is currently a director and editor at the Fred Rogers Company working on Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood. He is skilled in a variety of social media platforms and maintains his own website. We will certainly be able to put his talents to use. Welcome aboard Matthias!

Congratulations to Dorrie Smith-Richie on being elected as our new president. She has served on the board for many years and brings a great deal of experience to the table.

Our new officers are as follows:

Dorrie Smith-Richie – President

Marlee Gallagher – Vice President

Leslee Schaffer – Treasurer

Doug Deckert – Asst Treasurer

Jeff Wagner – Secretary

Glenn Miller – Asst Secretary

Thank you to Stephen Connell for his years of service and we wish him well as he moves on from our board.

We are all looking forward to the many positive changes coming down the pike in 2017.

2017 Observatory Hill House Tour by Bonny Kwolek

Great strides have been made in the planning of the Observatory Hill House Tour that will take place on June 4th. Several homeowners have already committed to opening their houses to tour goers for an event that will showcase the eclectic architecture that we have in our neighborhood. Having this commitment helps the committee to solicit sponsors for the tour knowing that the tour will not only be happening, but will include a wonderful variety of homes. Also, by knowing early, homeowners can plan specific projects they have been anticipating undertaking and have lots of time to complete them.

The tour this year will focus on the area of Observatory Hill between

Riverview Avenue and Franklin Street, with Waldorf Street being a major focus. We always encourage people to walk and by keeping the tour fairly compact, it will make it easy and efficient to navigate on foot, if desired. This strategy will also allow OHI to show off the progress that we have made in purchasing and rehabing houses on Bonvue Street as well as business development on Perrysville Avenue.

We welcome new House Tour Committee members! If you would like to be on the committee and be a part of the planning for this very important (and fun!) OHI event, please contact Bonny Kwolek at bonnyk6@gmail.com.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY 18: Monthly OHI board meeting at 7pm at the Byzantine Seminary, 3605 Perrysville Ave.

FEBRUARY 1: PWSA Information Session from 6pm-8pm held at the Pittsburgh King Pre K-8 Elementary School, 50 Montgomery Place.

FEBRUARY 15: Monthly OHI board meeting at 7pm at the Byzantine Seminary, 3605 Perrysville Ave.

MARCH 15: Monthly OHI board meeting at 7pm at the Byzantine Seminary, 3605 Perrysville Ave.

APRIL 2: Good Deeds Day. Volunteer projects will be held throughout the city – visit www.jfedvolunteer.org or call Joyce at 412-992-5214 to help with a project near you.

APRIL 19: Monthly OHI board meeting at 7pm at the Byzantine Seminary, 3605 Perrysville Ave.

A Message from the President by Glenn Miller

Led by a very strong Board of Directors who are volunteers, and with help from a wide range of neighborhood volunteers, the OHI organization has accomplished much this past year. We enjoy year round support from Councilwoman Darlene Harris' office, and further support from the office of the Mayor, and we have teamed with the Northside Leadership conference for several projects. We also thank the URA, the Northside Community Development Fund, Slovak Savings Bank, the Sprout Fund, and the Buhl Foundation among others to bring about big changes to our neighborhood. In 2016, OHI:

Delivered 35 OHI welcome packets to new homeowners this year.

Purchased three more houses on Bonvue St bringing our total up to eight homes and one vacant lot. We hosted a Well attended kick off/ground breaking ceremony for Phase I of the project which consisted of 5 homes on the street. The much-publicized event included Mayor Peduto, Councilwoman Harris, County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, representatives from the URA, Slovak Savings Bank, the Northside Leadership Conference, the Northside Community Development Fund, and Congressman Mike Doyle.

Received a \$1K grant for the Baytree Community Garden and \$5k for the proposed hops garden on the site of 2 vacant lots on Bonvue.

Received and distributed a \$10k sprout fund grant to fund improvements in the business district which resulted in façade improvements and repairs to several businesses, and the purchase of additional planters.

Commissioned sidewalk improvements and repairs in the business district to clear the way for additional street tree plantings.

Is transforming an overgrown vacant lot into a community garden located on Baytree Street. We have had help from 30 ALCOA volunteers who worked through GTECH Strategies. Volunteers are welcome to help with watering and weeding.

Through a Neighborhood Needs funding awarded by Councilwoman Darlene Harris' Office, Observatory Hill Inc. was the recipient of two community security cameras for our Business District. We were also able to purchase and install a server and wireless routers that will allow us to easily add more cameras to the system and avoid installation and operating problems that have plagued the project to date.

Hosted a successful Neighborhood History Tour that was attended by several hundred people from all parts of southwestern PA. The tour successfully shined a bright light on Observatory Hill.

Hosted another Spaghetti Dinner in October at the Riverview Park Activities Building which brought us together as a community.

Take a look at what we have accomplished this year and see if you are interested in helping to improve your community. Like the many volunteers who are helping us make things happen, the OHI Board is all volunteer and we can use your help. Want to help make the kinds of things listed happen? Have any new ideas to help our community? Want to join us on the Board? Come to one of our meetings or get hold of us somehow and let us know how you would like to help!

Take a 10-minute survey for your neighborhood! by Dorrie Smith

Calling all Observatory Hill neighbors! You can take a survey to help shape the future of your neighborhood. Read on to learn more about why your input is needed.

Observatory Hill has been experiencing flooding and pollution from stormwater (rain and snow melt) for decades. Whether it's your basement flooding, a river of water running down the street during rain, eroding hillsides, or localized flooding, stormwater is likely something you have had to deal with. When stormwater runs off of water-tight (impervious) surfaces like streets, roof-tops, and parking lots rather than soaking into the ground, it can create flooding and pollution. If too much stormwater enters the street drains it backs up the local combined wastewater and stormwater treatment system, causing raw sewage and polluted stormwater to drain directly into the Ohio River.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way! There are a number of interventions that mimic nature's way of purifying and

managing stormwater. These interventions are called green *stormwater infrastructure*. The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA) is under a government mandate to reduce stormwater runoff. PWSA just committed to a "Green First" approach to manage these issues. In the meantime, we want to know more about the issues that you've been experiencing with stormwater in your neighborhood. We also want to know which solutions you think are best, and what other green space improvements you'd like to see. GTECH is collecting this data to share with PWSA, community groups, and other decision-making organizations.

To learn more about this GTECH project and stormwater, visit gtechstrategies.org/projects/gsi or contact Observatory Hill's community liaison with GTECH, Dorrie Smith, at **412-877-4828**. And, finally, to take the survey, follow this web address: bit.do/stormwater. For a paper copy of the survey, contact Dorrie.

New and Notes from the Riverview Ranger

As you may know, there has been a full-time park ranger in Riverview Park since May 2016. My name is Nancy Schaefer and I appreciate this opportunity to highlight events, opportunities, concerns and issues related to Riverview Park.

Our office is in the Visitor Center, you are invited to stop in to explore, provide feedback, secure information or say hello. The Center has a nature oriented library with books for all ages and a couple periodicals. You will find a short narrative on the history of the park, pictures, trail maps, invasive species information, a lost & found, items you can use for play outside (balls, Frisbees etc.) and an accessible bathroom. A bulletin board is available for information, messages and outreach related to the park. **Because my office hours vary, you will know the Center is open when you see the easel chalkboard out front.** If the Center is not open, it probably means that I am on patrol in the park. Below is my phone number and email below, so do not hesitate to contact me.

One goal of the Ranger program in Riverview is to increase the number of people who use it, as it remains one of Pittsburgh's best kept secrets. I have heard that current park users enjoy the solitude and isolation of this park. Now for the betterment of the greater Pittsburgh community, I am working to attract more to experience this amazing green space and its many benefits. I also try to ensure people use the park appropriately and feel safe while they are here.

Programmatic initiatives currently under consideration include a monthly Riverview Ramble – a daytime hike and chat opportunity. Interest has been expressed for an on-going speaker series on topics related to nature. Please let me know if these ideas match your interest. I am happy to hear YOUR suggestions for programs and activities.

On the safety side of things, I have received reports that archery hunting is occurring in the park. City ordinance (Title 4, Chapter 473.01) states “no person in a park shall molest, harm, frighten, kill, trap, chase, tease, shoot or throw missiles at any animal, reptile or bird”. It is likely that there are areas adjacent to the park where hunting is permitted and Riverview Park boundaries can be

difficult to ascertain. I have been, and will continue to, patrol these areas in an effort to ensure the safety of park users and animals. If you see hunting occurring in the park, call 911 - the city ordinance is enforced by Pittsburgh police. If you'd like to know more about state regulations, check out the Game commission at their website: www.pgc.pa.gov/. Violations to state law can be reported to Operation Game Thief at **1-888-PGC-8001** or online at their website.

Dog owners appear to be the largest user group in our park. The fact that so many dog owners use Riverview contributes to park safety in a huge way by putting more “eyes on the street” at all hours of the day and night, and in any weather. We love all our Dogs!!! However the heavy use also creates opportunities for misunderstanding and potential abuse of the park. While Riverview has a reputation for being rugged, wooded and remote, at 270 acres it is by far the smallest of the 4 regional parks. Leaving your dog off leash on the trails and throughout the park (other than the off leash area behind the Observatory) has impact on other park users, animals and the landscape. It is also against city ordinance Title 6 Chapter 633.08. In speaking with violators of this ordinance, I usually hear “I’ve been doing this for **XX** years, my dog is trained, I pick up his waste, what is the problem?” The problem is that it is against the law and it is the number one concern that I hear from other park users who come to Riverview with the expectation that they won’t be exposed to a dog off leash. A related ordinance (chapter 473.05) states “dogs or any domestic animals are not permitted on playgrounds and courts at any time”. This has surprised folks who’ve been using the Riverview playground for many years with their dogs.

Please feel free to provide your input, feedback and suggestions for how the Riverview Park experience might be enhanced. I welcome and appreciate your input. Thank you for taking the time to read this update. Happy Trails.

Ranger Nancy Schaefer
412.616.0383
nancy.schaefer@pittsburghpa.gov

Retired and Senior Volunteer Program Needs You by Riley Baker

If you are over the age 55, then you qualify for this free program! If you are already a volunteer or looking for new volunteer opportunities, the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) can help support your volunteering activities. This national service program supports senior volunteers all over the country and will add your voice to the national volunteer narrative! We help match volunteers with opportunities that will best utilize their existing skills and experience. After you begin volunteering, we continue to

support your volunteerism through a modest array of benefits. We provide travel reimbursements, supplemental insurance, seasonal giveaways, and others, including a connection with a broad network of national service volunteers! Registering now only takes a phone call and will help provide all volunteers with some duly deserved benefits and recognition. Please call Pittsburgh Cares at **412-471-2114** and ask about RSVP.

Neighborhood News

Zone 1 Police hosted a public safety town hall meeting. One topic of discussion was the new ShotSpotter program which provides detection and location technology to locate gunfire. It will cost \$2.1 million for a three-year contract but the results prove to be worth the cost. It can accurately detect gunfire, the number of shooters at the scene in addition to the type of firearms being used. By helping to protect officers through tactical awareness and connecting the police with the community they serve, ShotSpotter helps to solve cases with improved evidence gathering and police effectiveness. Sensors are placed in a neighborhood. Then there is a two-factor classification process which includes machine algorithms and trained acoustic experts. Officers then receive alerts with visuals that show the gunfire location within a 30-foot radius – all in less than 60 seconds. This delivery of real-time information greatly improves the chances of finding the shooter. The program has been up and running for several years in some high crime neighborhoods like Homewood and Lincoln-Lemington. Councilwoman Darlene Harris is working to obtain funding so that this program can be brought to the north side's high crime areas.

Additional vacant tax delinquent properties have been submitted for the April treasurer's sale to acquire them for future rehabbing by OHI.

We have closed on our eighth home purchase on Bonvue Street and are working to line up phase two of our revitalization project.

OHI has been awarded a \$1,000 One Northside Neighbor-to-Neighbor grant by The Sprout Fund for our Baytree Community Garden. We are working towards expanding our raised garden beds to be able to provide fresh vegetables for the Riverview United Presbyterian Church's community food bank. Thank you to the Sprout Fund for helping to support this effort. We are looking to host a garden clean up and planting in the Spring so stay tuned for more details.

Pipitone Group Returns to Riverview Park for 2016 Volunteer Day



Security Cameras Fact or Fiction?

by Leslee Schaffer

In recent months, there has been a lot of misinformation circulating about the OHI cameras. This topic has been regularly discussed at our monthly meetings in an effort to keep everyone informed. If you are unable to attend our meetings but have a question or issue, please contact us and we will be happy to assist. With the popularity of social media, rumors, lies and misinformation can be spread easily which creates issues for us. We check social media when we can and we do our best to answer questions but we ask that this not be used as a primary means to communicate with OHI. If you need to contact us, you may call us at **412-736-2489** or you may email us at ohipgh@gmail.com. So let us address some of the concerns:

Darlene Harris: Many people think they should call Darlene when they need access to the video footage or if they just have an issue with the cameras. This is false. Darlene's only role is providing the community development groups with the grant money specifically earmarked to purchase cameras. She does not decide where the CDC puts them and she does not have access to the camera footage. Once she gives each CDC the funding, it is up to them to decide what camera provider they will use, how many cameras they will purchase and where the cameras will be located. You would contact OHI for any camera questions or issues – every time.

It has been said that OHI does not pay its bills so the cameras were turned off: This is also fiction. The internet connection is the responsibility of that business owner and no camera has ever been turned off due to a lack of payment of the internet service.

If there is a crime and you need to have access to the camera footage, you will need to call the police and file a report and then they will contact us to view the camera recording. They have our contact information.

Camera locations: We are in the process of installing six new cameras in various locations and we hope to have them all up and running by Spring 2017.

GOOD DEEDS DAY

OHI is teaming up with the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh for this year's Good Deeds Day. This is an annual event which encourages communities to work together on a volunteer project. We invite you to join us on April 2 from 12:30pm – 3:30pm to prep, clean up and plant flower bulbs at both the Baytree Community Gardens. Tools will be provided.

PWSA INFORMATION SESSION TO BE HELD

PWSA leadership will give a presentation on lead in drinking water and how residents can limit their exposure to it – followed by a question and answer session. It will be held from 6pm – 8pm on Wednesday, February 1 at the Pittsburgh King Pre K-8 Elementary School located at 50 Montgomery Place. If you have any questions, you may contact Will Pickering, Interim Communications Manager **412-255-2099** or wpickering@pgh2o.com.

Did You Know?

OHI sends out monthly emails to keep you in the loop on the latest happenings in the neighborhood – including our meeting information and guest speaker line up. To receive the monthly editions of Living in Observatory Hill, just send us an email at ohipgh@gmail.com and we will add you to our list.

THE OHI BOARD

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OHI Board Contact Info:

Phone: 412.736.2489 Email: ohipgh@gmail.com Website: www.observatoryhill.net

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Annual Registration Form for Membership to Observatory Hill Inc.

Mail to: Observatory Hill Incorporated.
P.O. Box 100247, Pittsburgh, PA 15233
412-736-2489

Members Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Date Paid _____

E-mail Address _____

Membership Contribution: (check one)

☐ \$5 ☐ \$10 ☐ \$15 ☐ \$50 ☐ Other
(Business Membership)

☐ Please include me on the email list that provides information on local activities and important community notices.

☐ Do not include me on any email notifications.

Make Checks Payable to: Observatory Hill Inc.