

OHI Journal



The Newsletter for the Friends & Neighbors of Observatory Hill

April 2005

Why We Live Here

Patrick Laverty

My wife and I bought a house on Watson Boulevard last year. We couldn't have made a better choice than Observatory Hill.

My dad's family has lived on the North Side since my grandfather was young. My dad's childhood house was razed to build I-279, but my grandfather owned a jewelry store on East Ohio Street until his eighties. My dad runs it today and lives in Brighton Heights.

I grew up in cow country southeast of Pittsburgh, my wife outside Philadelphia. Somehow we ended up in Observatory Hill, renting our first apartment, then buying our first house.

We rented in the Village In The Park apartments near Riverview Park, a great place to live in Pittsburgh. How many cities can a family live in and easily afford a home next to acres of park and woodlands, while being so close to work and stores?

Our dogs love the woods. We love the ten-minute commute. When we can't drive, the 11D bus is convenient, with no parking worries.

We bought our house from a man who lived on Watson his whole life. He grew up here, rented his first house as a father and husband, and then bought the house we now own. His parents live here still; we see him often.

On warm days, kids of many ages play and hang out near our house. This is a pretty safe place, where kids have fun outside and do "kid things." This is not a place where you forbid your children to play outside, where neighbors and children are practically nameless. A safe feeling permeates so much of Observatory Hill.

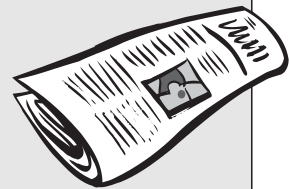
Kristin and I are simple, practical people. This is our kind of place. We want what we need, can afford, and to spend time together. The love and dedication we have is our foundation.

There is a more practical reason why Observatory Hill is home. The cost of living is very low. Our wonderful house would cost three times more in Philadelphia, likely not in a nice neighborhood with a huge park. Taxes and city government are an issue for another time; yet the net effect of living here is that the same lifestyle would cost twice as much in any other major city.

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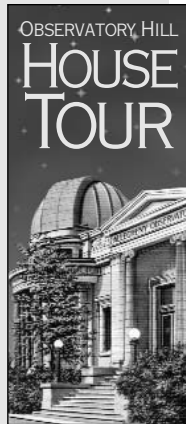
Save the Date:

Upcoming events in our neighborhood and region

Tim Tuinstra

Observatory Hill House Tour

The Observatory Hill House Tour will occur on Sunday, May 22 from 1 until 5 p.m. The event features tours of several beautiful homes in our neighborhood, exemplifying the fine architecture to be found in Pittsburgh's historic Observatory Hill neighborhood.



Chapel Shelter Landscaping

Later this month, the City of Pittsburgh, Department of Public Works, and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy will begin work to restore the landscape around the Chapel Shelter in Riverview Park by removing invasive trees that are spreading into the nearby woodlands and overtaking the native plants, destroying important wildlife habitat and decreasing the biodiversity of the park's ecology.

They will be replaced with native species already present in the park such as Linden, Sugar Maple and Beech trees. In addition, the historic Lilac collection will be pruned.

Currently, pink ribbons are attached to the native trees and shrubs that will remain on the site. Any tree or shrub without a pink ribbon will be removed. The restoration plantings will occur during the spring and fall of 2005.

If you have any questions, please call Philip Gruszka at the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, 412-682-7275.



Healthy Walk / Run Around the Park

On April 30th in West Park, students from area schools, including the Allegheny Traditional Academy, will compete to encourage physical activity in their daily lives. The Healthy Walk / Run Around the Park is sponsored by Allegheny General Hospital's Heart Institute.



Neighborhood Beautification Advances

Julia Vidic

Last summer many neighbors helped make our neighborhood more beautiful. People from Richey Avenue, Venture Street, Perrysville Avenue, Watson Boulevard, Marshall Road, and Evergreen Road came out in the hot July air. We focused on two areas: the Venture Street bend and the bottom of Baytree Street. We picked weeds, cut down over-grown vegetation, cleaned up trash, and spread mulch.

We as a community need to take the responsibility of keeping our neighborhood clean and litter free. Many neighbors will tell you that in the 1940s, '50s and '60s, this neighborhood was a nice, well-maintained area. Nothing flashy, but no trash. Motivation and pride in your and your neighbor's property is all that is needed.

Spring is coming. If you have an idea for a part of the neighborhood that could benefit from a community effort such as the one described above, please contact OHI.

The Candy Lady

Rafal Kowalczyk

This story is about a lady, Mrs. Lucille Plummer, a.k.a. the Candy Lady, whom many love and respect in the community.

It all started when Mrs. Plummer retired from Montefiore Hospital in 1995. After being used to an active everyday life, she knew she had to find some fulfillment in her day beyond taking care of her husband and household.

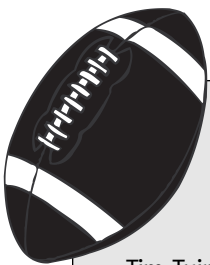
Mrs. Plummer didn't like that students attending Chatham Elementary School waited at the bus stop without adult supervision. So she began going to the stop at the corner of Perrysville and Venture each school morning. After asking permission of each parent, Mrs. Plummer passed candy out to the children at the bus stop (and some adults, too).

Soon, she was passing out candy to members of her church as well as other churches, doctors and nurses, and anywhere she went long enough to reach into her purse and grab a bag of candy.

Over the past few years, her legs have not been as strong so she doesn't walk to the bus stop anymore. However, when the weather permits, she sits on her front porch and waits for the children to come get their candy as they pass by.

Mrs. Plummer continues to touch people wherever she goes with her bags of candy and warm, loving smile. People throughout Observatory Hill have come to call her "The Candy Lady."





Perry Football

Tim Tuinstra

Congratulations are in order for the greatest high school football team in Pittsburgh City League's recent history. This crew produced their fifth straight city title in the fall, and made it past the first round of the state playoffs for the seventh time in the past eight years.

Do you realize that this tremendous squad is located right here in Observatory Hill? Now you know. Way to go Perry Commodores!

The football team representing Perry Traditional Academy clinched the 2004 City League title with a 23-12 victory over Peabody in the final at Heinz Field. Perry's 11-2 overall record (8-1 regular season) surprised most observers, who predicted the very young squad faced a rebuilding season.

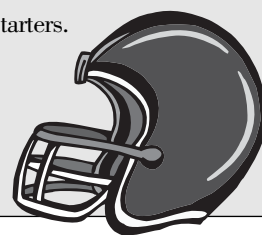
But not only did the Commodores, guided by coach Bill Gallagher, win the City League regular season title, they went on to win the city playoffs. Afterwards, they defeated Clearfield 12-9 in the first round of the PIAA playoffs. Perry fought hard in the second round, falling short by just 7-0 against Erie Strong Vincent.

No other team from Western Pennsylvania has matched the Commodores' run of reaching the state semifinals four times since 1997. Since the start of the 2000 season, the squad from Perry is 53-1 in City League play. This is the longest streak of dominance in the City League since Westinghouse claimed the title eight consecutive times from 1954 through 1961.

Despite losing 16 starters from the 2003 City League champion Perry squad, the 2004 Commodores passed early favorite Brashear and all other rivals. The championship team was guided by quarterback Desmond Brentley, running back Aaron Bivins, and wide receivers Gary Nolen and Aundre Wright.

Best of all, the Commodores look forward to the return this fall of all four, along with most of their other starters.

Six in a row, anyone?



OHI Committee Update

Tim Tuinstra

Observatory Hill Inc. has been very active in our community. Take a look for yourself. Feel free to join in!

Membership Committee

The membership committee has been continuing to accept new members to OHI. Although you receive this newsletter whether you are a member or not, membership dues go a long way to defray the costs and help fund valuable programs such as Family Swim Night. If you are interested in supporting OHI by becoming a member, contact the office, Peg Perlik, Lorraine Schwartz, or Glenn Miller, or fill out the registration form included on the back page of every newsletter.

Neighborhood & Business Committee

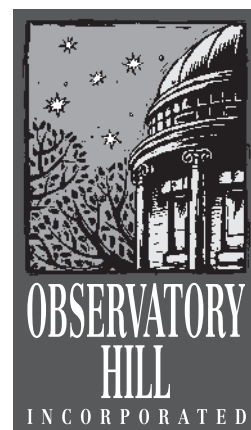
Committee members will shortly begin reaching out to inform Observatory Hill businesses, public offices and nonprofit services of the many benefits of working with and belonging to OHI. Street sweeping, flower pots, business district beautification, and improvement are among the advantages. Any local businesspeople interested are encouraged to contact OHI.

Public Safety Committee

The Pittsburgh police department continues to report that Observatory Hill enjoys one of the lowest crime rates in the city. Several block watches formed after Observatory Hill's community meeting late last summer contribute to the ongoing improvement of our neighborhood's safety.

As always, residents are advised to stay in touch with each other and exercise reasonable precautions. Report suspicious activity to the police and inform your nearest block watch captain. Consider joining your neighborhood block watch or form one with neighbors if you do not have one yet.

In March, District Judge Robert Ravenstahl hosted a meeting of Observatory Hill block watch members at which he provided an overview of his office's involvement and suggested methods for block watch members and others to coordinate and communicate in order to more effectively prevent crime. Watch for details in an upcoming issue.



Report from Councilman Luke Ravenstahl

Nuisance Property Legislation

We all know of properties in our neighborhoods that could be deemed “nuisance properties.” These are properties where the police or building inspectors are routinely called for code violations or other public safety issues. The individuals occupying these properties are responsible for the deterioration of the quality of life in the neighborhoods in which they reside. Law-abiding residents have become frustrated with constantly calling the police and may feel their efforts do not yield results.

Since I was sworn into office last year, my office has handled many calls about “nuisance properties” in my district. I recently co-sponsored legislation (Bill # 2004-0044) that aims to hold property owners accountable for their actions or the actions of their tenants. It is my hope that by being held accountable, property owners will make more of an effort to observe their actions or the actions of their tenants.

Specifically, the legislation states that landlords will be notified in writing when the police or inspectors are called to their properties. If the authorities are called to the property three or more times in 60 days and find violations (specifically listed in the legislation), the property owner will be responsible for the costs of sending an officer or inspector to the property.

It is my hope that this legislation will begin to give us the tools necessary to clean up our neighborhoods. If you would like additional information or a copy of the legislation, please contact me at 412-255-2135.



Luke Ravenstahl
Observatory Hill's City
Council Representative

City County Building
Suite 510/Floor 5
414 Grant Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Phone: 412-255-2135
Fax: 412-255-2129
Email: luke.ravenstahl@city.pittsburgh.pa.us

Observatory Hill Schools Update

Barb Stanton

Observatory Hill is the home to three local schools – Chatham Elementary School, Incarnation Academy, and Perry Traditional Academy.

Chatham Elementary School is located at 227 Bonvue Street. Under Principal Anita Walker, Chatham has an enrollment of approximately 200 students in grades Kindergarten through five and a Head Start program. This Pittsburgh Public School offers several community awareness programs including DARE, Officer Friendly, and Youth Crime Watch. For more information, call 412-323-3140.

Incarnation Academy, located at 4072 Franklin Road, has an enrollment of 112 students in grades Kindergarten through eight. Starting in the fall of 2005, Incarnation will also offer preschool. Sister Roberta Kardell is the principal at Incarnation, which is part of Incarnation Catholic parish. Every Friday is Open Door Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. where parents can visit the school, and meet teachers and faculty. In May, the Kindergarten class will present their Spring Fling, in which they will be performing a variety of different numbers. For more information, call 412-931-2330.

Perry Traditional Academy is located at 3875 Perrysville Avenue. Perry enrolls approximately 1,024 students in grades nine through twelve. The Acting Principal is Jacqueline Blakely-Tate. In the spring, this Pittsburgh Public School will have baseball, tennis, volleyball, softball, and track and field, along with the June 19th commencement. For more information, call 412-323-3400.

Memories

Peg Perlik

Do you remember...

...Ice from the ice wagon and 3 cent postage stamps?

...Dancing at West View Danceland?

...Donahue's Downtown?

...The Market House where Allegheny Center now stands?

...Roller-skating at the Diamond Roller Rink Downtown?

...Two mail deliveries a day? (This is going way back!)

...Leg makeup and pin curls?

...Sunday School picnics at the Chapel in Riverview Park?

...Trolley tokens: 3 for 25 cents?

...Ice skating on or swimming in Lake Elizabeth? (see photo!)

If you do remember, sends your memories to tht30@yahoo.com for our next publication of the *OHI Journal*.



Why We Live Here: *Continued from page 1*

The swift trip to work saves a ton of gas and maintenance money and gives us extra time together, instead of a grizzly commute.

Did I forget Riverview Park? What a fantastic resource for all of us! And I mean all of us. Talking with a man heavily involved with the park for years, I learned many Observatory Hill residents don't use the park much. Many people who walk and bike there everyday come from other neighborhoods and even the suburbs. The same even goes for the people attending community events!

The key to this, my friend said, is that this neighborhood is full of trees and wildlife! We don't think we need to go to the park. Besides a great variety of trees and plants, lots of deer,

“Kristin and I are simple, practical people. This is our kind of place. We want what we need, can afford, and to spend time together.”

squirrels and even a couple turkeys and raccoons live peacefully among us. Nonetheless, even residents can benefit from the park's playground, walking paths, picnic groves, and other attractions. Riverview Park is the hub of our peaceful, scenic neighborhood in a great metropolitan area.

For the future, this neighborhood has more opportunities for us with bigger houses (that we don't want to pay a gas bill for just yet!) or commercial space, or just the enjoyment of the park for years to come.

It seems we all are taken down a path with magnetic forces drawing us from one place to the next. I hope your magnets take you toward prosperity and security – and if that's Observatory Hill, I'll see you there!

Observatory Hill Architecture

Information for this article was provided by Rich Sestric, adapted from a 1986 Perry North brochure.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the greatest growth in Pittsburgh's history. Rapid industrialization and immigration increased the population dramatically. The growing population began to spread beyond the old core of the city.

Aided by the new technologies of cable car and electric street car, “suburban” development occurred on the city's outer edges. The North Side communities of Brighton Heights and Perry North (now called Observatory Hill) were among such neighborhoods.

Establishment of a streetcar line and the opening of Riverview Park spurred the growth of Observatory Hill. By 1910 considerable development arose along Perrysville Avenue. Further construction in the 1920s and '30s completed the physical character of the neighborhood.

The buildings reflect the various currents of architectural thought flowing at that time. These can be thought of as two major movements: the Classical Revival and Craftsman styles.



Drawing on ancient Greek and Roman architecture, Classical Revival emphasized order, symmetry, and a greater simplicity of form. Common features include classical columns and pilasters, dentil courses, quoins, and ornamented doors and window openings. Colonial Revival buildings fall into the category as well.

The Craftsman style rejected formal historical precedents for form and ornament, relying on the exposure of structural elements (such as the ends of rafters in the eaves) and the use of “natural” materials such as wood shingles, wood siding, and brick. The style used distinctive ornamental elements such as tapered porch columns. Craftsman buildings usually have low-pitched gabled roofs often extending over a front porch.

The many houses in Observatory Hill featuring these styles attract great attention and are much in demand, especially among young people seeking to revitalize older housing. Both newer and older homeowners and developers are working to maintain the neighborhood's outstanding architectural heritage, a wonderful part of the tapestry that is Pittsburgh.

Annual Registration Form for Membership to Observatory Hill, Inc.

Mail to: Observatory Hill, Inc.
P.O. Box 7651, Pittsburgh, PA 15214
412-231-2887

Member's Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Date Paid _____

E-mail address _____

Interests _____

Annual Membership Dues (check one)

☐ Community Member - \$5.00/household (adults over 18)

☐ Business Member - \$50.00

Make Checks Payable to: Observatory Hill, Inc.

About OHI

Observatory Hill, Inc., serves our neighborhood as a member of the Northside Leadership Conference. Call one of the Officers if you'd like more information or to get involved in your community. There are open board meetings the third Wednesday of every month at the Byzantine Seminary at 3605 Perrysville Avenue at 7:00 p.m. All are welcome to listen and participate!

The OHI Board

Susan Rooney
President
412-323-0899

Tim Tuinstra
Vice President
412-931-6013
tht30@yahoo.com

Barbara Glynn
Secretary
412-322-5580
Bdglynn@icubed.com

Dave Gilbreath
Treasurer
412-321-5043
davegilbreath@mercuryprinting.com

Katrina Brabham
412-323-9577

Moses Carper
412-583-5290

Mike Everhart
412-322-1680

Malcolm Hardie
412-231-6224
mhardierdblue@hotmail.com

Glenn Miller
412-322-5724

Walt Nalducci
412-322-6478

Peg Perlik
412-231-6710

Lynn Schraf
412-321-5043
lschraf@earthlink.net

Lorraine Schwartz

Richard and Jane Sestric
Emeritus Board Members
412-231-8134
sestria@telerama.com

Committees

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Quynh McGuire
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Walt Nalducci

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Moses Carper*
Brian Chapman
Denise Colbert
Barbara Glynn
Skip McCrea
Barbara Pace
Rich Sestric

Public Safety

Susan Rooney*
*Chairperson

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