

OHI Journal

The Newsletter for the Friends & Neighbors of Observatory Hill

May 2008

Family Roots Run Deep in Observatory Hill

BY BARBARA STANTON

Observatory Hill, like many city neighborhoods, is largely composed of people who have lived in the neighborhood for years, whose presence in the neighborhood spans generations. City living like this gives new meaning to the word "homestead." Many homes have only had one or two owners. Oftentimes, sons and daughters raise their children, and even grandchildren, in the homes where they were raised. Sometimes they can be found living a street or two away. It's not even uncommon to marry "the girl next door."

With all the new developments in the suburbs and with development in smaller communities outside the city, why do people choose to stay in the city or on Observatory Hill? What draws folks to this neighborhood? What makes children decide to stay and raise their kids here?

The OHI Journal took note and realized that there are a lot of interesting stories about people in our neighborhood who have lived here 30 years, 50 years, folks whose kids stayed on and started their lives on Observatory Hill. Over the next few issues, we would like to take this opportunity to spotlight some of these people, to let them share their stories of growing up, raising families, dealing with changes and to share their ideas about how to continue to make Observatory Hill a place that offers something for everyone.

In this issue, our stories introduce you to two women who have lived here for 40 years. They moved here when they were young, raised their children and watched changes take place over the years. Each woman offers a unique insight into what makes the neighborhood so livable. Please see pages 3 and 5 for more about families with longstanding community ties.

If you know of someone who would be a good candidate for an article, please contact the OHI Journal c/o Rich and Jane Sestric 412-231-8134, jmsestric@verizon.net, or one of the board members listed at the back of the newsletter.

Heritage Days Celebrate Uniqueness of Riverview Park

Riverview Park Heritage Days brings folks from all corners of the community together to celebrate the history of Riverview Park and the qualities that make the park unique: nature



activities, hiking and cross country trails, wildlife studies, tree and wildlife conservation. The park is a magnet for children, families, jazz enthusiasts and walkers of all ages. Beginning with a 5K race on Friday evening, the Festival will include a parade on Saturday morning and the Festival during the afternoon. The parade begins at 11am from Perry Traditional Academy and the Festival at 12 noon.

The events begin on Friday evening with a 5K race starting at 7:00, registration at 5, or see

<http://www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/parks/#events>

Beginning at the Park Visitor's Center, the race and fun run include t-shirts to all who register, prizes, and recharging refreshments at the "finish line".

To celebrate our country roots, we plan to host the Riverview Heritage Day Festival on Saturday, June 7th. We're planning for hay rides, horseback riding, a petting zoo, country line dancing and live music. Grab your partner and join us for the community fun as we celebrate the beauty and history of our green haven on the hill, Riverview Park. For more details, see page 5.

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Neighborhood Message

BY MAYOR LUKE RAVENSTAHL



Dear Neighbors:

As we continue planning for Pittsburgh's future, one of my top priorities is to ensure that we reinvest in our neighborhoods, in order to create safe, clean, stable and self-sufficient communities.

When you take a look at all reasons to love Pittsburgh, remember that we must continue to stay positive and keep talking about all of the things that make us Pittsburgh proud. Whether it's our parks and greenery, sports teams, our cultural district, or simply our friendly people, this is a place to go to school, go to work, raise your children, and retire. Pittsburgh has it all.

As we continue to preserve our rich history and traditions, we are making changes to ensure that we continue to grow, attract and maintain residents and businesses, and also create the cleanest and safest city possible. I want to keep Pittsburgh a place that you are proud to call home, and we are taking proactive measures to ensure that you can.

Working with the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, we have answered the call to re-establish proactive police presence in our neighborhoods. Last year, I pledged to reinvest in the Beat Cop program. That program is now up and running. Police Chief Nathan Harper has assigned four "beat cops" to each of the City's six police zones. Zone Commanders will assign the officers to business districts based on community need and crime data analysis.

Public safety in our neighborhoods is not just about fighting crime. We must eliminate the blight and abandonment that encourage criminal activity. One of the primary causes of blight is the number of dilapidated homes in our communities. To fight

this problem, I have doubled the 2008 demolition budget and set a goal of bringing down 600 structures this year. In addition, I charged my staff with finding new ways to look at the old problems that stalled this effort. My administration held meetings with the City's economic development and public safety departments, charging them with the arduous task of overhauling the City's demolition process.

We found that the existing process was too reactive. In order to confront the problem and make real changes, we needed to be proactive. With the all the departments involved working together, we created new methods to tackle hazardous, crime-ridden structures as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The City's most dangerous structures will continue to be torn down as a first priority, which will sometimes still result in scattered demolition bids. However, through the revised approach, the City's public safety and economic development bureaus have added another layer for bids: geographical second-tier demo zones. In these zones, multiple demolitions in close proximity will be bid as one package. The result? City taxpayers will get more for their money.

In addition, with the new process, we will not simply be razing houses. We will be aggressively greening the remaining vacant lots, so blight does not creep in again. The greened lots will be an asset to the community, creating visible opportunities for investment and economic development

With summer fast approaching, it is the perfect time to clean up and green up the City, and to enjoy community festivals such as Riverview Park Heritage Days, June 6th and 7th. I ask that you, too, seek opportunities to improve your neighborhood, to further enhance our efforts to proactively address blight and crime. Together, we can find ever more creative ways to continue to take pride in Pittsburgh.

Allegheny Observatory Tours Season Opens

Allegheny Observatory of the University of Pittsburgh will again offer tours for neighbors from across the city on Thursday and Friday nights, April through the end of October. All tours begin at 8 p.m. and last until approximately 10 p.m. Tour guides present a short slide or film presentation followed by a walking tour of the building, finally ending up at the 13" Fitz-Clark refractor. If it's a clear night you would be shown whatever

celestial objects are within range of the telescope that night.

In addition to the tours, visitors are welcome to attend lectures in the Observatory Lecture Hall on the third Friday of each month through November. University Astronomers and Physicists will present talks on "Life in the Universe", asteroids,

supernovae, and scientific leadership. Reservations are required for these lectures, so please call to make reservations for the night of your choice. During the fall the Observatory schedules an Open House when you can view the night sky from the large 30" telescope.

To learn about these programs, please call 412-321-2400 between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, or visit: <http://www.pitt.edu/~aobsvtry/>



Active Local Couple Named Neighbors of the Year

Residents of Observatory Hill for 19 years, Tom and Maureen Uhler have completely restored their house to its original condition. In 1995, they also made a decision to relocate their chiropractic practice from Route 8 in Hampton to this area as well and have never looked back. This year Dr. Tom and Maureen have been selected as 'neighbors of the year' and will be honored as OHI guests during a Northside Leadership Conference Awards Banquet on May 22nd.

Tom and Maureen have had their home on the house tour on four separate occasions in the past 14 years. Maureen served on the board of Observatory Hill, Inc. for 2 years. They have participated in various neighborhood clean ups and have planted



NSLC Awardes for 2008

flower gardens in Riverview Park and along Venture Street.

They find time in their busy schedule to run nearly every day – often in Riverview Park. They

participate in the annual Friday night race held in June. You may see Tom and Maureen jogging through the park or walking in the business district. They have invested time and great care in the neighborhood events that keep Observatory Hill a busy and connected community.

Peg Perlik's Family A Snapshot of Four Generations

BY BARBARA STANTON



L to R: Mandy, Peg holding Tessa, Grandma Peg holding Jorji, George, and Megan, on George and Peg's porch in Observatory Hill.

Peg Perlik has lived on the North Side since she was a little girl. She lived in Manchester with her family and remembers coming to Riverview park to ride the merry-go-round with her dad. She moved to Observatory Hill, to her row house on Watson Boulevard, with her husband in the late 1950's.

She raised three children, two girls and a son in that house, where she still lives today. Her husband died when her children were young and they didn't want to leave the neighborhood. Her two daughters, Peggy and Pam, still live on Observatory Hill, with their family. Peggy actually married George Reskovic of the Reskovic family, long time residents of Observatory Hill. Their legacy in the neighborhood spans across 5 generations.

Peg is involved in several community activities, including AARP as the Sunshine Lady and Membership Coordinator for OHI Inc. She also enjoys going to lunch with her friends and being with her family.

Through her years in Observatory Hill, she has seen several changes. Some of the positive changes she has seen are her neighbors. Everyone looks out for each other, is aware of what's going on and takes care of each other. "It's a group of people," she says proudly.

However, her biggest concern for the neighborhood is the amount of abandoned homes. She also thinks it important to get the business district built up again and get more business in the area. And, like other residents, the school system also is among some of her concerns. There are no grade schools here for the residents and the kids are getting bused around.

Living here for over 40 years has provided a lot of good memories for Peg. Her best memory is probably was when everyone was young with kids. "At one point, there were 17 kids living on this row", she said referring to her row house. It was a different time then.

It is hard for Peg to describe Observatory Hill in one word. She has always enjoyed sitting outside on her porch steps and talking to neighbors who are interested in each other. Smiling, she says that she wouldn't want to live any place else, "We are just city people."



Josh, Peggy Sue and Peg's daughter Pam of Grizella Street

Update from City Council

BY DARLENE HARRIS

What a thrill it will be when we cut the ribbon on the newly remodeled Riverview Park Chapel! Work is being completed on Phase 1 and is well underway on Phase 2, thanks to the efforts of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, working in conjunction with the City of Pittsburgh Department of Public Works, Department of Parks & Recreation, and Department of Planning.

Phase 1 was the work on the building itself – reinforcing it, rebuilding the supports, the floor, and other structures, while maintaining a beautiful historic appearance. Phase 2 is the land around the building, which is being cleared of invasive plants and replanted to reflect appropriate native species which also add an attractive touch.

Of course, we always look forward to the Heritage Festival, which is more excitement coming in June. Improvements are proceeding all across Riverview Park, with a newly paved trail (using a resilient pavement which encourages walking) and other amenities.

In other municipal news, Council passed and the Mayor signed legislation early this year to help abate nuisance properties. The new law provides for “disruptive property abatement” based on the premise that such places contribute a “substantial unacceptable threat and burden on the common health, safety and welfare of the residents of the City of Pittsburgh.” The legislation makes the property owner responsible for the cost of law enforcement resulting from authorities being called to the disruptive property, which is defined as a property where the owners, tenants, occupants, or any invitees violate certain statutes of the Pittsburgh Code or of state law.

This law should help give us teeth in getting rid of absentee landlords and the nuisances they ignore, in addition to increasing enforcement against homeowners who abuse their privilege by breaking the law. The relevant laws include such matters as public drunkenness, gambling, bookmaking, unwarranted noise, firearms, corruption of minors, improperly kept property, health violations, etc.

As always, if you have any issues you would like to discuss – cheerful or worrisome – please call my office.

Meanwhile, please remember that when the weather is nice, kids are out playing and riding their bikes and skateboards. Please be especially careful when you are driving. Working together, we can make our neighborhoods shining examples of all the joy that springtime in Pittsburgh offers.

Problem Properties Investigated Zone 1 Police & NSLC

The Zone 1 Police Department is creating a database regarding problem properties in our neighborhoods. NSLC is requesting that if you have a problem property in your neighborhood that meets the following conditions please let us know:

- Suspicious activity
- Known as a hang out for gangs

- Suspected of illegal drug activity
- Police called to the location and arrests were made
- Police called to property in the past

If you know of a house or apartment that has any of all of the above conditions, please provide the information to the NSLC. Also, you can be assured that any information you provide will be handled in the strictest of confidence. When notifying the conference, include the property address, owners name if possible, and any other details you would like to provide. Please keep in mind that the Conference and Zone 1 want to take a pro-active approach to problems in our communities and work with neighbors to clean up our community streets.

For more information please contact Rhonda at the Northside Leadership Conference, 412-330-2572, or e-mail her at Rhonda@pittsburghnorthside.com

Do You Remember?

BY PEG PERLIK

Riverview Park has always been an important part of Observatory Hill and North Side. It has been updated over the years, with new and renovated buildings added. Do you and your family remember earlier times at Riverview Park?

...when Nancy and Phil and the Nature Center Staff provided classes for youngsters in the shelter below the Activities Building that used to be called “The Bear Pit”? Our grandparents could visit a small zoo in the park – the park at the “end of the line” near the city limits long ago.

...when gold fish swam in the pool below the fountain at the main entrance to the park across from the Visitor’s Center?



....when you could visit raccoons and small animals who lived near the original Nature Center just above the intersection of Riverview Drive and Maridale Street? You can still see the foundation on the left side of Maridale near the bottom of the hill, just at the first stop sign. ...tennis courts behind the Chapel Shelter that had a walking path beyond down toward Snyder’s point?

Feel free to write Peg with your memories for future editions of “Do You Remember.” E-mail ideas to jmsestic@verizon.net, or mail them to OHI Journal, Peg Perlik, 121 Richey Avenue, Pittsburgh PA 15214.

Across the Generations

Local Family Ties Remain Strong

BY JANE SESTRIC



Granddaughter Rachel, Grandmother Helen Holt, and Daughter Ruth Woods all live in the neighborhood and enjoy the friendly, quiet streets of Observatory Hill

“We are family” takes on a larger meaning when you get acquainted with the Holt family of Perrysville Avenue. Originally from the East End, Helen Holt and her family have lived in the community for almost 40 years, ever since her husband Ernie “fell in love” with their home in 1969. Three

generations of Helen’s family have lived here, including her mother (now 104), and her five children who enjoyed growing up here. In fact, her daughter Ruth and son Chris both live in the North Side near home.

Their house on the terrace above Perrysville near Marshall was originally Judge Smith’s house. As they were moving in and unpacking boxes, one of the neighbors brought over a tray of ham and turkey as a welcoming treat on a busy day. The family stayed for all these years because of the quiet homey feel of the community

and friendly neighbors who are always there when they’re needed. “We looked out for each other’s kids,” she recalls.

Helen worked as a teacher for most of her life. Through her life she and her daughter Ruth can remember working hard but having so much fun with families and children of the neighborhood. Ruth went to school at McNaugher, then Chatham. She remembers difficult times during the days of the racial unrest in the country that spilled into the streets around McNaugher.

Helen points out, “The most important thing is to maintain family values so people can enjoy the community. To keep things nice everyone has to work together, to watch out for each other’s kids.” Helen and Ruth credit “block watch” programs and neighborhood picnics for keeping the community close knit.

Ruth has seen change in the community: parents who both work, latchkey kids, parents keeping kids indoors more with fewer kids “on the street” due to fear. When asked about the challenges to the community, both Ruth and Helen see a lack of nearby schools as significant.

Helen looks around at her daughter, her granddaughter a student at Winchester Thurston and “natural teacher,” and her extended family nearby and recalls, “Many good memories here” and “good neighbors we have now.” When asked to describe the neighborhood in one word, Helen and Ruth agreed that would be “comfortable”.

Riverview Park Heritage Days

Slated for June 6th and 7th

BY JANE SESTRIC

For over 100 years, families have enjoyed the open spaces and green sloping hills of Riverview Park, home of a regional swimming pool, tennis courts, three large Citiparks shelters, biking and horse trails, jogging trails and Allegheny Observatory of the University of Pittsburgh. Riverview Park is home to birds and wildlife, and a haven for bikers and hikers who visit from around the city and county. Riverview is more than “a little bit country,” since it has been bordered by two equestrian stables, home of bridal trails for western horses, and at the crossroads for truck farms of Troy Hill Road that once supplied the city and Strip

District with produce all summer.

You can watch the parade from the sidelines, then follow the action into the park for an afternoon of nature related events, historical and native American exhibits, country music, dancing and pony and hay rides. We invite all community groups and sports teams to our “homecoming in the park.” We intend to recognize special guests and groups connected to the park and invite your participation. In addition to special guests that include local leaders, we plan to send out recognition and thanks

to community groups who have participated in plantings, clean-ups and community events from years past and from the current time.

Please join us and help us to celebrate during our own “country fair” in the city at the Riverview Park Heritage Days. Information about signing up for the race and activities in the park is available at the Park Visitor’s Center and posted at the business district near East and Perrysville Avenue. We welcome your ideas and participation. Please phone OHI and speak with Moses at 412-583-5290 or Rich Sestic at 412-231-8134 or leave a message at the OHI office, 412-231-2887.



Annual Registration Form for Membership to Observatory Hill Inc.

Mail to: Observatory Hill Inc.
P.O. Box 99204, Pittsburgh, PA 15233
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

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