

OHI Journal

The Newsletter for the Friends & Neighbors of Observatory Hill

July 2004

Stay Safe by Confronting Issues

Observatory Hill, Inc. held a special community meeting on Wednesday, June 30, at the Mount Zion Lutheran Church to coordinate efforts about safety concerns in the neighborhood. 132 neighbors were in attendance to voice their concerns about suspicious and illegal activity in the neighborhood, which is highlighted by the recent homicide perpetrated on Perrysville Avenue and an armed home invasion on Vinceton Street.

Meeting moderator Mark Fatla said, "Every neighborhood faces these problems at some time. But the neighborhoods that address them early, organize, and communicate are the ones that nip the problems in the bud and that stay strong. Seeing so many people here tonight attests to this neighborhood's will to confront the issues."

Fatla is the executive director of the Community Technical Assistance Center, a non-profit group that provides technical assistance to neighborhood groups, tenant councils, community-based organizations and community development corporations in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Issues identified by neighbors included noise and public disturbances caused by young people loitering on sidewalks, at vacant property, and around Perry High School; graffiti; neglected and deteriorated properties in violation of city ordinance; illegal dumping and an increase in litter and garbage; irresponsible absentee landlords; and driving at excessive speeds.

By far, however, the most concerns were raised about increased drug activity along several Observatory Hill streets and in Riverview Park. Fatla suggested effective ways neighbors can help police fight drugs in Observatory Hill.

"Like anyone selling a commodity, drug dealers have to have a place where their customers are comfortable buying. You can make them and their customers uncomfortable in your neighborhood and make them relocate."

This issue of the *OHI Journal* outlines some ways in which you as residents can make a difference and help keep Observatory Hill a great place to live, work, and play. The OHI board of directors urges all neighbors to join us at our next board meeting on Wednesday, July 21, 7:00 p.m. at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary on Perrysville Avenue, where we will discuss how to begin combating drugs in Observatory Hill with neighborhood Block Watches.

Next OHI Board Meeting: Taking Action:

*Creating Block Watches in
Observatory Hill*

Wednesday, July 21, 2004
7:00 p.m.

Byzantine Catholic Seminary
3605 Perrysville Avenue

*Watching out will
make a difference!*



Neighborhood Block Watch



The only way crime can exist in your neighborhood is if criminals feel comfortable operating there. Hiding from and ignoring illegal activity in your neighborhood only allows it to continue.

Organizing a Block Watch is the first and most effective things neighbors can do to make criminals feel uneasy. What's more, taking action as a group increases your safety as well as the effectiveness of your efforts.

Getting Started

- **Call a meeting.** Passing out flyers door-to-door, and if possible following up with phone calls, is the most efficient way to get a crowd together for an initial meeting. Or, invite your neighbors over for a cookout and start the dialogue.

- **Contact a police officer from Zone 1** whose responsibility it is to work with block watch groups in your zone. You can also contact an OHI board member for assistance in getting started.

- **Take down names and phone numbers** at the meeting for everyone willing to participate. At a minimum, participation means agreeing to keep your eyes open, to report crime to the police, and to alert your neighbors to suspicious activities in the area through a "telephone-tree."

- **Choose a Block Watch captain** to coordinate this telephone-tree information and pass it on to the police, chair regular block meetings that promote neighborliness, canvas complaints and suggestions, and keep the group focused on safety.

- **Let everyone know what to watch for.** There are some obvious things Block-Watchers should look out for and report and some not so obvious: a stranger entering your neighbor's home or car, people loitering outside of a business after hours, someone sitting in a parked car alone or with someone else, an open window or door, screams, breaking glass—anything that seems out of place, unusual or suspicious. It is also a good idea to write down as many details as you can so that your information is of real use to the police.

Don't Just Watch

- **Continue recruiting.** Your neighborhood Block Watch group should involve everyone that you can to broaden your support base. Try to involve neighborhood churches, schools, and businesses that will participate in your goal for a safer, tighter, and stronger neighborhood.

- **Gather information.** Have members take turns attending Public Safety Council meetings for Zone 1. Call Aggie Patchan, 412-766-3166 for more information.

- **Get training.** The Citizen's Police Academy is a program in which Pittsburgh residents meet to discuss law enforcement issues, study criminal law and vehicle codes, tour police and 911 facilities, ride along on patrols, and learn about the use of force and firearms through "shoot/don't shoot" exercises. Classes start Sept. 27, 6 PM-9 PM and meet every Monday evening, and the course lasts about four months. To register, call 412-665-3601. *Space is limited.*

- **Organize mobile citizen's patrols** as a way of monitoring and subtly discouraging local criminal activity. Take turns driving around the neighborhood — use the buddy system and be smart — keep an eye out for trouble and note peculiar behavior in a nonconfrontational way.

- **If you witness a crime,** it is most helpful to police if you report it immediately. Call 911 with as many details as possible. You can report it anonymously by calling Crime Stoppers at 412-665-4000 or 412-255-8477.

Your Block Watch group is a standing committee of good, committed neighborhood people. If you do nothing more than stay in touch with one another and funnel information to the police, you'll be doing something important, and making a difference to your neighborhood.



Saving Your Neighborhood

Every neighborhood has problems.

Every neighborhood has people who complain about the problems.

Every neighborhood has a few people who lead.

NOW is the time.

HERE is the place.

WE are the ones.

Roger Conner, Executive Director Center for the Community Interest

Saving Our Neighborhood

There is only one way to confront our neighborhood's safety problems and that is by trading ideas and brainstorming about possible solutions – together. To “take back” our Pittsburgh neighborhood, we need to:

1. Analyze the problems
2. Identify and recruit key partners
3. Devise a plan of action and stick to it
4. Celebrate progress and victories
5. Plan for the next phase of action

Some of the information on the following pages contains valuable ideas and suggestions from the Center for the Community Interest's *Saving Your Piece of Pittsburgh: a How-to Manual* by Patrick Griffin.



The Writing on the Wall

Graffiti can be a powerful visual symbol of disorder that erodes public safety, reduces the attractive physical qualities of the neighborhood, and contributes to decreased property values, business vitality, and neighborhood stability.

Neighborhood graffiti problems will never be overcome without a fast, flexible, and determined local response, which makes it a perfect candidate for neighborhood self-help solutions.

The keys to winning the graffiti war locally are zero tolerance, quick response and dogged persistence. Above all else, graffiti vandals want their “work” to stay put, where everybody can see and admire/deprecate it. If that desire is thwarted instantly and repeatedly, they will go elsewhere for their kicks.

You can help deter graffiti on your property with the same methods that deter other sorts of illegal activity:

- Keep a porch or other outside light on after dark.
- Organize a Block Watch to patrol and look for vandals.
- If you see graffiti “artists” call the police immediately with a detailed description of the vandals.

The Graffiti Law

Defacing property has always been a crime in Pittsburgh. It's punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000, or imprisonment for up to 30 days.

Cleaning up the graffiti, however, is the legal duty of the victim. The job of prompting victimized property owners into removing or covering up graffiti — citing them, setting deadlines for abatement, and checking up on results—belongs to the Bureau of Building Inspection (BBI).

Private property owners — once notified by the BBI—have 10 days to remove or cover up graffiti, in most instances. The city reserves the right to use public funds and access private property to remove the graffiti when property owners prove uncooperative.

But when graffiti vandals deface city or public property, the Department of Public Works “Graffiti Busters” crew is responsible for cleaning up the mess. To report graffiti on city property, call Graffiti Busters at 412-255-2872.

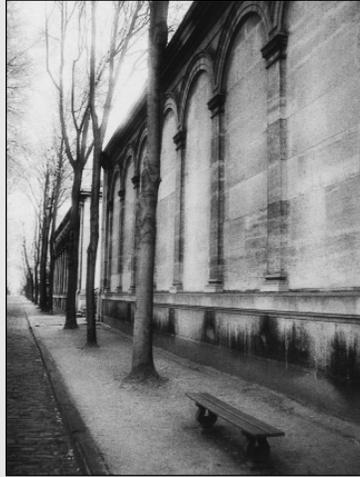


Win the War against Drugs in Your Neighborhood

Pittsburgh's police force works hard, but you as neighbors, who spend more time in Observatory Hill than anyone else, can be the eyes and ears that help police crack down.

1. Organize.

Like the old adage says, there is strength in numbers. Create a Block Watch in your neighborhood and work together to patrol the streets and look for suspicious activity. You and your neighbors will be more effective when your efforts are unified. See page 5 for details on how to organize a Block Watch.



2. Take away their sense of security.

Drug dealers and their customers need to feel comfortable in their environment to be successful. If they feel the eyes of the neighborhood upon them, they will no longer be comfortable doing business. Simple tactics can make a difference.

- Keep your porch lights on after dark to eliminate large dark areas where drug dealers and buyers can hide.
- When coming home or leaving, take an extra trip around the block before you park. Even a small increase in traffic flow will make dealers feel like more people are watching.
- Arrange street patrols through your Block Watch. Dealers and buyers will avoid streets where they risk being seen by neighbors.

3. Report suspicious activity immediately!!

As soon as you spot suspicious activity, call 911 with as many details as possible. Drug deals go down incredibly fast, and the sooner police can act, the more likely they will be to locate the suspected dealers and buyers near the scene. See "Be an Observant Witness" on this page for tips on how to report suspicious activity.

If you see repeated activity in a certain place or by a certain person, call the Pittsburgh Police's Narcotics Division at 412-323-7761. If there is a record of activity, the chances of suspected dealers and buyers be caught increases dramatically. A record of reports by Observatory Hill residents helped police find the perpetrator of the recent Perrysville Avenue homicide, and took one more suspect off the street.

Be an Observant Witness

Commander Kelly and Officer Brian Roberts from the Zone 1 police station were on hand at the June 30 community meeting to answer questions and let residents know how to report suspicious or illegal activity.

"The best thing you can do is be as detailed as possible in your descriptions," said Officer Roberts.

Whether you're reporting a crime, suspicious activity, or information to be used in an investigation, the more details you can provide the more valuable your report will be.

If you witness a crime, there are four important things to observe and report:

1. The exact location
2. The exact time
3. Whether the suspect had a weapon
4. Which direction the suspect fled

If a car is involved in the crime, make note of:

1. The make and model
2. Color
3. Condition (and distinguishing characteristics, like a broken tail light or dented fender)
4. License plate number

For people involved, note:

- Physical characteristics—sex, approximate age, height, weight, hair color, hair length, facial hair, tattoos, earrings.
- Clothing—color and style of shirts, shoes, jackets and hats.

Timing is also important. If you witness a crime or suspicious activity, IMMEDIATELY call 911 with details.

If you notice a pattern of suspected drug activity, call the Pittsburgh Police's Narcotics Division at 412-323-7761 to ensure the activity is on record.

Sarah Heinz House

Building Character • Building Community



The Sarah Heinz House (www.sarahheinzhouse.org) located on the North Side of Pittsburgh, has been helping local youth gain the skills necessary to lead full, productive lives for over one hundred years. It is our desire to surround the boys and girls of this neighborhood with such good influences that they will never want to depart from the right paths. Good citizenship is the purpose that we shall keep in view. Character, which is the outgrowth of honor, will be the goal of our endeavors.

Membership and Programs

Our programs teach children more than new skills; they teach respect for self and others, discipline, appreciation for nature, self-reliance, and community service. Sarah Heinz House programs are also designed to teach the importance of individual responsibility, active problem solving and questioning, and the care and respect for others.

Eligibility: All children in the Pittsburgh region from ages 6 – 18

Cost: 25 cents per year plus 25 cents – \$1.00 weekly club dues

Program Sessions: October – April

Enrollment Info: Enrollment begins mid-September. Fill out a registration form in person. Call 412-231-2377 for more information.

Sarah Heinz House members:

1. Must attend two core programs twice a week: Gym/Swim and Club. The Club activities teach socialization skills, citizenship, peer relations, attitude management, and etiquette.
2. May enroll in extra classes and activities, some of which require small fees:
 - Arts:** Piano, voice, drama, art, dance
 - Practical skills:** Cooking, sewing, wood shop, computer classes
 - Sports:** Basketball, soccer, deck hockey, softball
 - Fitness:** Swimming, weight training, martial arts
3. Can benefit from education and employment support programs:
 - One-on-one after school tutoring
 - Evening study halls provide a safe, congenial environment for doing homework
 - Learning to use technology to improve employment opportunities.
4. Can participate in special activities:
 - **Summer Day Camp:** Four 2-week sessions of daily summer camp
 - **Summer Residence Camp:** A 12-day stay at a residential camp near McConnell's Mill
 - **Campaign for Others:** An annual fundraiser for assisting individuals in need.

Campaign for Expansion

Sarah Heinz House has embarked on an \$8.2 million "Building Character" Capital Campaign to design and build a 30,000 square foot addition that will house an Olympic size swimming pool, another full-size gymnasium, new fitness facilities, a concession area, and lockers, and renovate the existing 45,000 square foot building to make room for a technology lab and library. For more information, call Melissa Hardoby at 412-231-4176.

Members of the community can contribute to the expansion through the BUY-A-BRICK campaign. We will have your brick engraved with your unique message, which will then become a permanent part of Sarah Heinz House and a legacy for your family. To have a Buy-A-Brick order form mailed to you, please call Cathy Fodor at 412-231-2377.

Important Community Phone Numbers

Emergency Numbers:

Crime Stoppers	412-323-7800 412-255-8477
Councilman Luke Ravenstahl	412-255-2135
Graffiti Busters	412-255-2872
Police Bureau Narcotics and Vice Division	412-323-7761
Zone 1 Commander Kelly	412-323-7201
Zone 1 Police	412-323-7201

Other Numbers:

Bureau of Building Inspection	412-255-2176 412-255-8888
Chief of Police	412-323-7814
City Jobline	412-255-2388
City Planning	412-255-2201
Dog License	412-255-2575
Engineering	412-255-2783
Environmental Services	412-255-2780
Finance	412-255-2582
Fire Chief	412-255-2860
General Services	412-255-2330
Housing Authority Drug Hotline	412-365-2000
Housing Court	412-255-2605
Law Solicitor	412-255-2010
Mayor Service Center	412-255-2621
Office of Intelligence	412-323-7844
Operation Clean Sweep	412-255-2720
Parks and Recreation	412-255-2362
Park Shelter Permits	412-255-2370
Paint Your Heart Out Pittsburgh	412-255-2636
Personnel	412-255-2717
Pittsburgh Parking Authority	412-560-7275
Public Safety Training	412-665-3601
Public Works	412-255-2726
Public Works Division 1	412-323-7209
PWSA	412-255-8937
Traffic Court	412-255-2700
Tow Pound	412-255-2500
URA	412-255-6620
Zoning	412-255-2231

Cut out and save

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

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Quynh McGuire
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Denise Colbert
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Scott Pipitone
Susan Rooney
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Nominating

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Barbara Glynn
Richard Sestric

Northside Leadership Conference (NSLC)

Scott Pipitone*
Barbara Glynn
Richard Sestric

Parks

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

Public Safety

Susan Rooney*

*Chairperson

Observatory Hill Journal Credits

Editor: Scott Pipitone Design

Design and Layout: Scott Pipitone, courtesy Scott Pipitone Design - 412-321-0879

Printing: Dave Gilbreath, courtesy Mercury Printing - 412-241-1189

Summer 2004

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P. O. Box 7651

Pittsburgh, PA 15214-0651

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 3666
Pittsburgh, PA