

The Heritage Hill Association's 2007 Report to Neighbors

"The purpose of the Heritage Hill Association is to provide neighbors a way of collectively building a healthy, historically preserved community in which people can live and work in a secure and stable environment."

WHO WE ARE:

The **Heritage Hill Association** is the neighborhood organization of the Heritage Hill Historic District. Our boundaries are the northern property lines of Crescent Street to the southern property lines of Pleasant Street (including the 600 block of Union SE); the eastern property lines of Union Avenue to the western property lines of Lafayette Avenue; also included is a jog down State Street to Jefferson Avenue to Fulton Street. Everyone who lives within these boundaries is a member of the Heritage Hill Association. Non-residents can also be members by contributing annual membership dues.

There are **1,300 structures** in the neighborhood that, per the 2000 census, house **3605 households**. Of these households, 82% are tenants, 18% are owners. Our **population totals 5,599**. Of that total, 75% are Caucasian, 17% are African American, 5% are Hispanic or Latino, 2% are Asian, the remaining 1% is a mix of Native American, Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander and mixed races; 64% are our residents are low to moderate income. As of 2002, 66% of our structures are either owner occupied or neighbor owned; the remaining 34% are absentee owned.

Heritage Hill is an urban neighborhood and the Association's programs assist and work with neighbors to **address urban problems** -- neighborhood safety, land use conflicts, increasing traffic and parking demands, institutional expansion/construction disruption, housing maintenance and preservation issues, promotion of neighborhood schools, access to limited services, and other issues inherent in a densely populated, core city neighborhood. Just as with old houses, a neighborhood is dependent on a good and ongoing maintenance program!

Active, engaged, and mobilized neighbors, working with all our neighborhood institutions, the City of Grand Rapids, and any and all community resources, are the best indicators that Heritage Hill is a vital place to live and work!

OUR SERVICES:

Crime Prevention Program: The purpose of the program is to increase neighborhood safety with programs that activate neighbors in **Neighborhood Watch, Drug Watch, and Block Clubs**. Key components include free home security surveys, personal safety information, victim assistance, and producing and producing and distributing crime information/alert notices and fliers. Block Club organizing helps neighbors work together

to prioritize problems, identify resources, and develop and implement action plans to resolve problems. In 2007, this program was partially funded by federal funds that the **City of Grand Rapids** awarded to the Heritage Hill Association.

Neighborhood Improvement: The purpose of this program is to generate resident involvement and leadership to preserve, protect, and maintain the residential nature of Heritage Hill; to resolve issues of concern; and build upon neighborhood strengths that improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. Issues commonly include land use conflicts, traffic/parking struggles, institutional expansion, promoting neighborhood schools, etc. Additional components consist of educating, referring and assisting residents with available City services and community resources and implementing and re-evaluating needs identified in the *Master Plan of Heritage Hill*. Like the crime prevention program, this program is partially funded by federal **Community Development Block Grant** funds that the **City of Grand Rapids** awards to the Heritage Hill Association.

Apartment/Homes for Sale Listing Service: Due to our **high rental population**, the Association produces and publishes a weekly list of available apartments in Heritage Hill whose landlords choose to list with our service. It is an extremely popular service. Copies of this list are free and are available at our office and also on our Web site (www.heritagehillweb.org). For landlords, the price to list an apartment is \$45 for a studio apartment; \$50 for a one-bedroom; \$55 for a two-bedroom and \$60 for 3 or more bedrooms. The listing is for 2 months or until the apartment is rented, whichever comes first. The list also includes **Homes for Sale** in Heritage Hill. **For Sale** listings run for two months, are purchased by the owner or the owner's agent, and cost \$100. Additional services that we offer landlords and tenants include assistance with their rights and responsibilities.

The Heritage Herald: The Association produces and publishes a bi-monthly newsletter that is mailed to the 4,800 addresses in Heritage Hill. Its purpose is to inform neighbors of events, issues, and other information of interest. It also promotes neighborhood identity and fosters community.

The Heritage Hill Web Site: The Association maintains and updates a website that hosts a variety of information regarding our neighborhood including the weekly apartment listing. The site contains the **guidelines of the City's Historic Preservation Commission** as well as their application for any exterior work. "*Heritage Hill at your fingertips*" offers photos and information on every structure in Heritage Hill. Most addresses have an inventory card that was completed when the historic district was nominated in 1969, a photo from that same time, and a recent photo from 2003-04. All this information is a click away and allows access to the Association's historical house records. Check it out at www.heritagehillweb.org.

The Annual Tour of Homes: This is the **largest fund-raiser and promotional effort** of the Heritage Hill Association. The funds are needed to sustain our Crime Prevention and

Neighborhood Improvement programs. It also promotes our architectural heritage and our neighborhood as a great place to live and work!

Social Events: The Association hosts two neighborhood wide events to bring all neighbors together to celebrate our community. The **Summer Night Out Picnic** is held in early June, the **Holiday Potluck** is the Friday after the Thanksgiving weekend. The Association also hosts the annual **Yard Sales Day** that happens the Saturday of the week before the Memorial Day Weekend. Last May 18 we celebrated with over 50 block captains/ reps at our first **Block Rep Mixer**.

Architectural and Historical Survey Files: The HHA office maintains the architectural survey files of each house in the neighborhood that were compiled in 1969. This survey was necessary to place Heritage Hill on the **National Register of Historic Places** that effectively saved over 75% of the neighborhood from demolition. Most of the information from these files is posted on our website.

Etc., etc., etc., ... The **Heritage Hill Association office** is often the first place neighbors call for a multitude of questions regarding ... most anything. Common questions include historic preservation, landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities, contractor referrals, neighborhood issues, who lives at ... who to call for this ... how can I handle this problem ... who can shovel my snow ... what is that house zoned for ... when is garbage day ...etc., etc, etc.

THE ASSOCIATION AND NEIGHBORS' 2007 ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Land Use issues:

- ◆ Active participant in **ReZone Grand Rapids** that produced a new zoning code for the City of Grand Rapids. Attended countless meetings, reviewed and provided input on the new language and policies, and supported its passage before the Planning and City Commissioners.
- ◆ Involved in a 6 month planning process for **Michigan Street** that addressed streetscape design and wayfinding systems.
- ◆ Participant in **Davenport University's relocation plan**. Committee designed a re-use plan for the downtown campus that will be used as a guide for prospective developers. If the campus is sold today, it will be a minimum of two years before Davenport would move.
- ◆ Initiated the process for designating State Street as **Neighborhood Enterprise Zone** - (Final City Commission vote is 2/5/08) This is part of our coordinated effort with neighbors and commercial owners in the Cherry, State and Madison area. The effort will include safety issues and promote State Street as an attractive and safe place to walk, visit, shop and live. Stratus Properties is the developer of the NEZ catalyst project that will add 14 new condos to 345 State Street.
- ◆ Addressed the development plans of the new owners of **Bethlehem Lutheran Church**. Numerous meetings with HHA committee members and one neighbors meeting to present plans and gain feedback. Based on neighbors' opinions and the

guidance of the *Master Plan of Heritage Hill*, supported the proposal before the City's Planning Commission. The condo development is beginning at this location. Very minor changes will be made to the current church building.

- ◆ Assisted tenants, neighbors and the owners at **46 College NE** following the devastating fire in January, 2007.
- ◆ Reviewed monthly **Grand Rapids Zoning and Planning Department** agendas for issues affecting the neighborhood.
- ◆ Maintained **communication network** with each neighboring hospital, college and university, including the planned **MSU Medical School**. Representatives from Davenport University and Saint Mary's Hospital continued to serve on the 2007 HHA Board of Directors.
- ◆ Continued neighbors meetings with Saint Mary's Hospital regarding its development of the **Neuroscience Center** (Cherry and Jefferson) and associated parking ramp.
- ◆ Worked with the **City's Forestry** division and organized a neighbors' meeting to address the onslaught of the **emerald ash borer** in our neighborhood. This menace infested trees on College and Lyon Streets that have been cut down. It is sad to say that more of our trees will be removed in 2008. Provided published information regarding plans and tree replacement in the Heritage Herald and at the HHA office.
- ◆ Addressed a use variance on the **North College Block** and supported neighbors before the Zoning Appeals Board.
- ◆ Participated in **Kent County's development and relocation plans for the Department of Human Services** from its current Franklin Street campus to the new development at the former Sheldon Complex. The Association's focus was the parking lot at the corner of Pleasant and Madison SE. Currently, the Franklin Street building and grounds are for sale. Until a new owner is identified, there are no proposals for the lot.
- ◆ Assisted 3 residents with necessary documentation for the State's **Historic Tax Credits** program.
- ◆ Monitored 100+ open housing cases with the **City's Housing Team Leader** on a monthly basis. Worked with tenants and owners needing assistance with addressing housing code violations. Presented information to the Housing Board of Appeals on two cases. Used photos to document **housing code violations** and instructed residents on how to report violations and follow up with the housing inspector on their respective cases.
- ◆ Worked with housing inspectors on a 17 addresses of concern to residents. Issues identified by residents included exterior deterioration, securing vacant houses, home security, interior violations, lack of heat, threatened water shut off, electrical problems, peeling paint, and trash/garbage.

Crime Prevention and Community Organizing:

Our goal is to work with neighbors, use any available resources to help us and to follow up until the problem is resolved. This works amazingly well though sometimes it takes awhile. Recently we got a note saying, "I can't thank you enough. I'm very appreciative

for everything...” after working with several neighbors since summer to resolve mismanagement of a rental property.

- ◆ Responded to **crime problems reported by neighbors** in Heritage Hill. Worked with neighbors, victims and police on developing action plans to successfully resolve problems. These included: vehicle break-ins, persistent panhandler problem on State Street, drug activity at 8 addresses and violence and disturbances at 9 other addresses. We worked with rental owners on resolving 3 serious disturbance problems with assistance of our **Community Officer Dan Myers**.
- ◆ Worked with residents and sought resources to resolve a variety of **non-crime problems**. These included early overflowing dumpster at an apartment building, very early morning dumpster pick ups; tenant rights to privacy; getting security deposits back; working with block reps on deteriorating housing, or zoning violations. We assisted in getting speed enforcement on Logan SE during Wealthy Street construction. Provided information about **Home Repair Services**; free classes on home repair, low cost legal help (Senior Hotline, Legal Assistance Center, Legal Aid), and how to work with city Housing Inspections Department.
- ◆ The **Drug Watch program** worked with the neighbors and North Police Team on 8+ locations. Wrote and called owners of rental units where drug activity was suspected. We have a good relationship with many owners and provided the information they need to take action. In all cases, the suspects were evicted, arrested or agreed to move out.
- ◆ Assisted 2 rental owners who asked for help with tenants who were involved in drug activity.
- ◆ Coordinated block club, block rep, condo “watch”, business district and multi block meetings on various crime and neighborhood improvement issues.
- ◆ Our **Court Watch** provided information to Judges at the **61st District Court** on 5 cases of people involved in criminal activity in the neighborhood. One for a man arrested for felony domestic violence, another case regarding a man arrested after a drug raid, 2 for drug related evictions and 1 for a prowler.
- ◆ Provided information on criminal activities to **State Parole office and GRPD** on suspected rapist who has served a 24 year sentence (for burglary) and will be released in March of this year. Police who worked the cases in 1984 are still on the job and will be watching for problems.
- ◆ Contacted probation officers twice when individuals on probation became a nuisance or danger to neighbors. This resulted in “quieting” of the activity.
- ◆ Worked with the **North Police Team** and Community Officer Myer on a pattern of vehicle break-ins (though many were *not* locked). Provided map of where the incidents occurred. Unfortunately the thieves are still finding valuables left in cars.
- ◆ Added 100 new households to our **Heritage Hill E-Alert** network. E-Alerts are sent to 300 neighbors, to our North Police Team Captain Pam Carrier, Lieutenant Theresa Budzilik and Community Police Officer Dan Myer, Mayor Heartwell and our commissioners. **To receive E-Alerts/Updates, send your e-address to heritage@heritagehillweb.org**

- ◆ **Twenty-three alerts/informational fliers** were developed and e-mailed and/or distributed door-to-door by volunteers. Recipients are encouraged to forward e-alerts to other neighbors or get copies from HHA and distribute them door-to-door to neighbors.
- ◆ Wrote **Neighborhood Potpourri** column for 6 issues of the Heritage Herald providing crime prevention information and updates on events and issues in the neighborhood. Wrote obituaries for residents who have passed away. Residents are encouraged to let us know when a neighbor passes away so we can recognize them in the Herald.
- ◆ Six households were provided **free home security inspections** and given detailed written recommendations for improving safety.
- ◆ Assisted residents in organizing their annual **500 Paris/Union alley clean up**.
- ◆ Organized volunteers for three **Foster Park and State Street Clean Ups** in the Cherry, State and Madison SE area. HHA Board members, neighbors and Calvin College Students planted perennials, mulched a path, and cleaned up trash and weeds under all the trees on State between Madison and Lafayette.

Parking and Traffic:

- ◆ Parking and traffic issues continue to be issues for the neighborhood, primarily in the north end but also pockets of concern in the south end – primarily around Saint Mary’s Hospital campus. Addressed various issues as best as possible with limited tools available for change. These issues will continue to be monitored and options explored and evaluated for potential solutions.
- ◆ Addressed issues related to construction work on Wealthy Street and detour routes in Heritage Hill, primarily along Logan Street. Assisted Logan Street in getting radar enforcement for speed and better directional signs at Union and Logan.
- ◆ Requested that “loading zone” be removed on State SE so 9 additional parking could be added to the business district. Of course each now has a parking meter!

Neighborhood Schools:

- ◆ **HHA Education Committee** met over refreshments with representatives and principals of high schools and elementary schools that serve Heritage Hill neighbors to further communication between us.
- ◆ Assembled appreciation baskets for the teaching staff of the Montessori program at the Central, Fountain campus and to the Martin Luther King Academy.
- ◆ Organized a **student art display** for Home Tour weekend.
- ◆ Maintained an information link with our neighborhood schools. Collected donations at the Annual meeting that HHA matched, and donated **\$381 each to the G.R. Montessori Public School at Fountain and the Martin Luther King Academy**, for school projects.
- ◆ Monitored GRPS buildings, **Vandenberg and the Heritage Child Development Center** for new use potentials.

Neighborhood Promotion:

- ◆ Organized and orchestrated the annual **Home Tour**; showcased 10 open houses and recruited **335 volunteers** to staff the homes -- **over 3,000 people toured** our neighborhood on the first weekend of October.
- ◆ Compiled and published 6 issues of the **Heritage Herald** and distributed to **4,800 neighbors**.
- ◆ Compiled, produced and provided weekly **apartment listings** at the HHA office and website.
- ◆ Organized the June **Heritage Hill Night Out Picnic** and our **3rd Annual White Elephant Auction**. Proceeds went to the Well House Family Shelter.
- ◆ Orchestrated the **Holiday Potluck** in December with over 100 neighbors applauding each other and ushering in the holiday season and new year.
- ◆ Organized the annual **Heritage Hill Neighborhood Wide Yard Sale Day on the Saturday before the Memorial Day weekend**.

And: handled 1000's of calls and walk-ins regarding a multitude of quality of life issues in Heritage Hill

Carrying on in 2008 ...