

## The Heritage Hill Association's 2008 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](http://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. Began posting of City Assessors' photos from the 1930's survey. All this information is a click away and allows access to the Association's historical house records. Check it out at [www.heritagehillweb.org](http://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!

**The Annual Heritage Hill Garden Tour:** New in 2008, our first Garden Tour proved very popular so that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Garden Tour happens on June 20, 2009.

**Social Events:** The Association hosts two neighborhood wide events to bring all neighbors together to celebrate our community. The **Neighborhood-Wide 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

**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' ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY YEAR OF 2008:**

#### **Land Use issues:**

- ◆ Worked to have the **Heritage Child Development Center** at 538 Madison SE returned to residential use. Met with Grand Rapids Public School officials and GRPS Board members, as well as GR Planning Commission to oppose special land use as worship, community center. This special land use was denied by the City's Planning Commission. Continued discussions with GRPS Board members until December 6<sup>th</sup> when the decision was made to sell the property for use as a single family home and artist studio.
- ◆ Addressed the expansion request at **Circle K gas station**; supported use as 5 bedroom **Bed and Breakfast at 440 Logan SE**; supported the use variance for **Winchester at Wealthy**; worked with **Rylees' Hardware** on its relocation zoning needs on Michigan Street; and opposed the use of **550 Madison SE** as a two family,
- ◆ Active in **Green Grand Rapids** that is in process of designing the open space and parks plan for the City of Grand Rapids.
- ◆ Involved in the planning process for the **Michigan Street Wayfinding System** that addressed signage design and placement along the Michigan corridor.

- ◆ Co-sponsored a **Preservation Workshop** with Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Commission and the EastHills neighborhood association.
- ◆ Worked with **Grand Valley State University** and addressed its purchase of the former Bethlehem Lutheran Parking lot on Lafayette near Michigan Street. Opened communication channels and a university representative is attending monthly HHA Board meetings.
- ◆ Finalized report of the **Davenport University's relocation plan** in concert with the university, city representatives and other community resources.
- ◆ Designated State Street as **Neighborhood Enterprise Zone**. This is another part of our coordinated effort with neighbors and commercial owners in the Cherry, State and Madison area. The effort includes safety issues and promotion of 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 plans to add 14 new condos to 345 State Street.
- ◆ Participated in discussions with County officials regarding the re-use and sale of the **Department of Human Services' Franklin campus**. Promoted the concept of the Pleasant/Madison parking lot conversion to a neighborhood park. The campus is currently for sale and we will continue to monitor, address possibilities as they arise.
- ◆ Reviewed monthly **Grand Rapids Zoning and Planning Department** agendas for issues affecting the neighborhood.
- ◆ Maintained **communication network** with each of our neighboring hospital, colleges and universities.
- ◆ Continued to hold neighbors meetings with Saint Mary's Hospital representatives to address neighbors' issues and the development of the **Neuroscience Center** (Cherry and Jefferson).
- ◆ Worked with the **City's Forestry** division and provided information regarding the **emerald ash borer** and the City's plans for tree removal and replacement.
- ◆ Assisted 6 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. Staff also worked with block reps on deteriorating housing, or zoning violations at least 20 addresses in the Hill – some with severe deterioration issue after foreclosures. We also informed neighbors about **Home Repair Services** free classes on home repair do it yourselfers, low cost legal help (Senior Hotline, Legal Assistance Center, Legal Aid), and how to work with the city's Housing Inspections Department

**Crime Prevention and Community Organizing:** Our goal is to work with neighbors to help prevent or resolve crime problems. Important resources are the Grand Rapids Police North Team, 61<sup>st</sup> District Court, Block Clubs, Block Reps, rental owners and Heritage Hill neighbors.

- ◆ **Neighborhood Meetings:** We coordinated or assisted block reps with organizing 10 neighborhood meetings on various blocks throughout the Hill. We also organized three area-wide crime prevention meetings. The North-End neighbors met on July 10, South-end neighbors met on July 16 and the Mid-Hill

neighbors met September 18. **Police officers Dan Myers, Curtis Creighton and Aaron Westrick** talked with neighbors about police response time and police coverage. We will continue the group meetings in 2009 but individual block meetings are also planned. Call Barb at 459-8950 if you would like help with getting people together on your block or in your apartment building on any topic.

- ◆ **E-Alerts and Updates:** In 2008 HHA e-mailed dozens of fliers and block reps delivered hundreds of alert fliers door-to-door to inform neighbors about meetings, events and opportunities. Neighborhood Watch alerts warned of a window peeper, car break-ins, apartment burglary, scams and panhandling. Recipients are encouraged to forward e-alerts to other neighbors or get copies from HHA and distribute them door-to-door to neighbors. **To receive E-Alerts send us a note at [heritage@heritagehillweb.org](mailto:heritage@heritagehillweb.org) call with your name, address and phone number – and e-mail address.**
- ◆ **Networking with other Organizations on crime issues:** HHA maintains communications with Saint Mary's Health Center, Central High School, Kendall College, Grand Rapids Community College and Davenport College Security offices on matters of mutual interest. They receive our E-Alerts and are contacted by phone if needed. This winter a graffiti problem was stopped when a neighbor called us with a description right after her car and garage were spray painted. HHA staff called a security officer at a near by institution and gave a description. Two weeks later HHA got a call from that security officer who recognized the suspect based on our witness's clothing description of the suspect. He talked to the suspect and gained a confession.
- ◆ **Court Watch:** HHA staff and neighbors provided information to Judges at the 61<sup>st</sup> District Court for cases of 6 people who were involved in criminal activity in the neighborhood. The crimes were for felony domestic violence (3 cases), creating disturbances and a burglary. Judges have banned suspects from the entire Heritage Hill neighborhood on several occasions. Three young men charged with allowing a disturbance (almost nightly) moved as part of their sentencing agreement with Judge Logan in response to our Court Watch efforts with neighbors.
- **Drug Watch:** Drug sales and the associated violence have diminished over the last decade and that trend continued through 2008. The Drug Watch program worked with the neighbors and North Police Team on 5 locations last year. In the 1980's we had up to 12 locations with multiple instances of violence then.
- **Graffiti:** It's the scourge of any neighborhood but **Stacy DuBose in Streets and Sanitation** has a great crew that has come out numerous times when we report graffiti. To report graffiti, call **456-3666** with the exact location and background color needed to cover the damage.
- **Personal Safety:** In 2008, HHA staff performed **13 free home and apartment security surveys** for residents in Heritage Hill. Vulnerable spots in security are checked so that an intruder cannot get in quietly or quickly. In addition, HHA responded to neighbors' complaints about a man living in a vacant foreclosed house who was violent, threatening and intimidating. We worked together toward an arrest and then to get a high bond and ban from our neighborhood. With help

from **Community Officer Dan Myers and Detective Jamie Chianfoni** the suspect is facing a prison sentence.

- **Vehicle break-ins:** Thieves found cars especially tempting this year and stole items of value from 158 of them. They also took parts or accessories (batteries, stereos, speakers, GFIs, etc.) from 15 other vehicles. Break-ins of vehicles was the most prevalent incident in 2008 with. People new to Grand Rapids don't realize they cannot leave a purse, laptop, cell phone or coins in their cars. HHA sent Alert warnings to hundreds of households via the internet (E-Alerts), door-to-door fliers and through warnings in our Heritage Herald newsletter urging that everyone clear their cars of valuables before locking and leaving them.
- **Panhandling:** Street panhandling, so prevalent in 2007, actually slowed down in the last half of 2008 according to some neighbors. We had been reminding residents not give at the door or on the street. Police have been making arrests of especially aggressive panhandlers on State Street. There are lots of organizations that provide food, shelter, medical and social resources 365 days a year that could use our donations.
- **Burglary:** Home burglary incidents are also trending downward with approximately 38 home burglaries (27 forced; 11 no force) in the neighborhood in 2008 down from 96 in 1998. This accomplishment is significant because HHA led the movement to get the "deadbolt lock ordinance" written into the city housing code in 1990. The ordinance requires deadbolt locks and window pins. Burglary prevention will always be a priority because new neighbors may lack "city smarts" so another part of our mutual job is to include and update newcomers on our Neighborhood Watch or Block Club activities.
- **Garbage:** A nasty problem anywhere. We worked with owners and the city on a number of trash, garbage and litter problems this year. Almost all were resolved with a simple neighborly approach. One (an overflowing dumpster in front of a large apartment building) generated an amendment to the city nuisance code. Neighbors and HHA thank **Assistant City Attorney Bernard Schaefer** and **Neighborhood Improvement Director James Hurt and Supervisor Amy Goethal** who were instrumental in presenting and supporting the passage of the amendment that provides penalties for chronic nuisance problems cited as Civil Infractions.
- ♦ **Tenant Assistance:** We helped several hundred tenants with issues such as rights to privacy; security deposits return; getting repairs done, code violations and more. We provided Rights and Responsibilities and Personal Safety information to new residents stopping in our office. This year we worked with almost two dozen tenants who were baited into pre-paying rent on an apartment that was not available when they tried to move in. They eventually got their money back but had to find a new place within days. The owner had use of thousands of dollars in pre-paid rent from unsuspecting tenants for months at a time. Unfortunately we are still getting calls from victims.
- ♦ **Neighborhood Potpourri:** Our newsy column in the Heritage Herald was a blend of issues, events and updates from around the neighborhood in every issue of the Heritage Herald. We also wrote memorial notices for residents who have passed away if we become aware of it. Please let us know.

- ◆ **Neighborhood Clean-Ups:** We organized cleanups on **State Street, Madison and Cherry, Cherry and College, Foster Park** and worked with volunteers to help two senior citizens with yard clean up and exterior painting projects last summer and fall. Many thanks to Calvin College Students, Auto Cam, JC Penney, our Board members, and neighborhood volunteers for their hard work. We also thank **BJ (Jordan) at Home Repair Services** for loaning us their tools for our projects.

#### **Parking and Traffic:**

- ◆ **Parking and traffic concerns** 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. We addressed various issues as best as possible with the limited tools that are available for change.
- ◆ 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!
- ◆ Reviewed the **Michigan Department of Transportation** plans for the bridge reconstruction along the Michigan Street corridor of 196.
- ◆ Requested the City survey neighbors on the removal of **odd/even parking on Lyon Street**. Neighbors elected to keep the current parking status.

#### **Neighborhood Schools:**

- ◆ Maintained an information link with our neighborhood schools.
- ◆ Collected donations at the Annual meeting that HHA matched and donated **\$200.00 to each the G.R. Montessori Public School and the Martin Luther King Academy** for school projects.
- ◆ Monitored **Vandenberg School** for new use potentials.

#### **Neighborhood Promotion:**

- ◆ Built a new **architectural walking tour for Heritage Hill** under the direction of architectural historian, Rebecca Smith Hoffman. Check it out at the Association’s website, [heritagehillweb.org](http://heritagehillweb.org).
- ◆ Honored our founding members, **Linda DeJong, Barbara Roelofs, John Logie and Ethel Hansma** at the Association’s Holiday Potluck and 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. Over 100 neighbors applauded each other and their neighborhood association in its 40 years of service to Heritage Hill.
- ◆ Organized and orchestrated the annual **Home Tour**; showcased 10 open houses and recruited **318 volunteers** to staff the homes -- **over 3,000 people toured** our neighborhood on the first weekend of October.
- ◆ Organized the first annual Garden Tour. The successful event will continue in 2009 so mark your calendars for June 20<sup>th</sup>.
- ◆ Compiled and published 6 issues of the **Heritage Herald** and distributed to **4,800 neighbors**. Began posting the newsletter at our website.
- ◆ Compiled, produced and provided weekly **apartment listings** at the HHA office and website. Advertised the Association’s rental listing service and available apartments at housing workshop sponsored by MSU as well as GVSU’s student newspaper and Craig’s List.

- ◆ Organized the June **Heritage Hill Night Out Picnic** in cooperation with Saint Mary's Hospital and in celebration of the Association's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The new Foster Park location played to rave reviews.
- ◆ Organized the annual **Heritage Hill Neighborhood-Wide Yard Sale Day on the Saturday before the Memorial Day weekend.**
- ◆ Participated in **Grand Valley State University's Civic Studio** work on *Wealthy End to End*. Provided mapping information and a variety of information needs and research. Attended final class discussion of students' experience.

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

**Here we go again in 2009 ...**