

The Heritage Hill Association's 2013 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 rear property lines of Crescent Street to the southern rear 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. **Resident neighbors and businesses are encouraged to support the work of the Association through its annual pledge drive.**

From the 2010 census, there are **1,300 structures** in the neighborhood that house **3,467 households**. Of these households, 70% are tenants, 30% are owners. Our **population totals 4,103**. Of that total, 81% are Caucasian, 9% are African American, 4% are Hispanic or Latino, 2% are Asian, the remaining 4% 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!

Heritage Hill was recognized by the American Planning Association in **2012 as a *Great Place in America***. In 2011, *This Old House* magazine as it named Heritage Hill named one of **2011 Best Neighborhoods in the United States**.

A LITTLE HISTORY:

In 1968, neighbors organized together to stop mortgage red lining and the urban renewal plans that would have demolished over 75% of Heritage Hill structures. The first goal of the Heritage Hill Association was to block the bulldozers. Neighbors worked diligently to invoke national preservation legislation that put Heritage Hill on the National Register of Historic Places. This stopped the demolitions and set a precedent throughout the U.S. that is still cited today. In 1988, the Association was the first Grand Rapids neighborhood to establish its own Master Plan of Heritage Hill. Today this plan continues to be updated and guides the Association and the City regarding life in the neighborhood.

OUR SERVICES:

The Crime Prevention Program: This program is provided to increase neighborhood safety with services that activate neighbors in **Neighborhood Watch, Drug Watch, and Block Club Organizing**. Key components include free home security surveys, personal safety information, victim assistance, and producing and distributing crime information/alert/e-alert notices and fliers. Block Club organizing keeps neighbors working together to prioritize problems, identify resources, and develop and implement action plans to resolve problems. In 2013, this program was primarily funded by federal Community Development Block Grants that the **City of Grand Rapids** receives and then funds a myriad of community programs, one of which is the Heritage Hill Association's.

Neighborhood Improvement Program: This program addresses all the other quality of life issues that are not crime related. Its purpose 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 the federal **Community Development Block Grant** funds that the **City of Grand Rapids** awards to the Heritage Hill Association's program.

Apartment/Homes for Sale Listing Service: Due to our **large rental community**, the Association produces and publishes a list of available apartments in Heritage Hill whose landlords choose to list with us. It is an extremely popular service and Heritage Hill apartments rent like hotcakes! Our list is free and available at our office and also on our Web site (www.heritagehillweb.org). To list an apartment, landlords pay a fee: \$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 cost \$100 and run for two months. Additional services that we offer landlords and tenants include assistance with their respective rights and responsibilities.

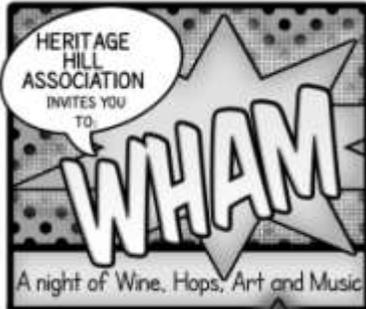
The Heritage Herald: The Association produces and publishes a bi-monthly newsletter that is mailed to a combined 4,800 addresses in Heritage Hill, non-resident members, businesses, city offices and other community resources. It publicizes events, issues, and other information of interest to neighbors. This is done to provide information, promote neighborhood identity and foster community. Occasional **e-newsletters** and updates keep people informed in between the HHA's printed newsletters. Please forward your email address to us heritage@heritagehillweb.org to be added to this distribution list.

The Heritage Hill Web Site: The Association's website hosts a variety of information regarding our neighborhood. The apartment listing is available here along with the **guidelines of the City's Historic Preservation Commission** and the application for any exterior work. There is information and links to the Federal historic tax credits. Most every house in Heritage Hill has its historical and architectural information and photos from 1969 and 2004 posted on our site. Go to the "about" heading on our home page and scroll down to the "house search". The Association's **Facebook** is also easily accessed from the home page of the website.

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 Home Tour moved back to its initial spring roots in 2011. The fabulous ArtPrize was too tough to compete with so we've moved Tour out of its way! The date for **2014 is May 17 and 18.**

The Annual Heritage Hill Garden Tour: The 2013 Garden Tour was under the leadership of North College Block Club (NCBC) and was a blooming success. We rotate every year so the 2014 Garden Tour is headed to the south end of Heritage Hill. This is the call-out to *all you southern Heritage Hill gardeners!* Please consider opening your quiet space this summer and call, email the office and let us get you on our garden line-up in 2014.



Wine, Hops, Music and Art (WHAM): Back by popular demand, the Association's wine, beer and food tasting was great fun and a fine fundraiser. The Women's City Club graciously hosted the event that was filled with local art pieces donated by our neighborhood artists and friends. A live band kept things rockin' as neighbors tasted, toasted, and bided the night away. Look for it again this fall because it is the fund and fun-raiser to be at.

Social Events: The Association hosts two annual neighborhood wide events to bring all neighbors together to gather around our community table. The **Neighborhood-Wide Night Out Picnic** is in August (**August 7, 2014**); the **Holiday Potluck and Annual Meeting** is the Thursday after the Thanksgiving weekend (**December 4, 2014**). The Association also invites neighbors to hold an annual neighborhood-wide **Yard Sales Day (June 7, 2014)**.

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. Much of the information from these files is posted by address on our website in the house search category under the "About" heading.

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

THE ASSOCIATION AND NEIGHBORS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2013:

Land Use Issues:



- **State Street Corridor Area Specific Plan:** The plan was completed and approved by the Heritage Hill Association Board following a final neighbors' public hearing in July. This plan now guides and encourages development on this corridor that connects *downtown to Uptown*. Land use and design patterns set the tone for a revitalized street. The plan will seek City approvals in 2014. A design charette was staged by the *Build a Better Block* collective on the weekend of Home

Tour. This creative venture brought over 2,000 people to the strip and encouraged folks to imagine possibilities -- parklets, water retention gardens, street vendors, bus stop libraries, etc.



- **345 State Street** was purchased in 2013 and will bring 34 new housing units and first floor retail space to this anchor building that has long been vacant. Two stories will be added and incorporated with the existing attached parking ramp. The Association and neighbors worked with the developer **Karl Chew of Brookstone**

Capital and used the Corridor Specific Plan to redesign plans to bring much needed retail to this building as well as State Street. See this exciting development take form in 2014. This project joins the **Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi** that purchased 311 State Street in 2012 and spent 2013 redesigning its space. A new close neighbor also arrived on the scene. **Cornerstone Church** moved into the former Church of Christ Scientists at the corner of Lafayette and Washington. The energy is pulsating from this corridor.



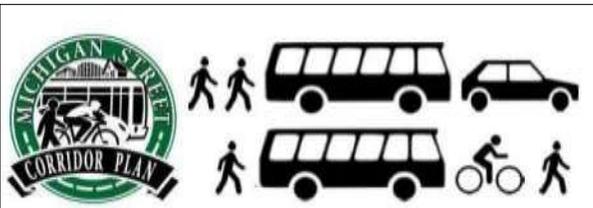
PLEASANT PARK

Brick buy brick
or buy a tree, bench,
or bike rack -
It's your opportunity to
get your name on the
park and push the park
to its construction.

- **Pleasant Park:** The ground breaking was staged on December 2, 2013 with the grand opening slated in August 2014. The special tax assessment in the targeted area around the park along with the DNR trust grant were huge in de-paving this parking lot and creating a city park. We encourage a "self-assessment" that you can make at the Friends of GR Parks website -

<http://www.friendsofgrparks.org/pleasantpark> if you live outside the assessment district. Bricks, benches, trees and more can also be purchased for the park at that website.

- **Michigan Street Corridor Planning:** Continued work with the City of Grand Rapids



and numerous stakeholders on the Corridor Plan. This plan addresses the look, feel, traffic patterns (vehicle, pedestrian and cycles) and land uses of this major artery from the Grand River to the Beltline. The 2-year planning process was completed in 2013.

- **Bed and Breakfast ordinance/Air BnB:** The Bed and Breakfast

ordinance change in early 2013 brought to the surface another option in short term rentals in residential homes. The popularity of internet sites and uses such as Air BnB, gave voice and strong support for an alternative to traditional Bed and Breakfast operations and regulations. The City formed a well rounded task force to explore regulatory options for rentals that don't match a traditional Bed and Breakfast. All opinions are represented in this task force and several HH neighbors and representatives are serving. Look for recommendations this coming spring. With regard to the prior ordinance Bed and Breakfast change, HHA stressed its support of traditional bed and breakfasts that preserve the residential character of the neighborhood.



- **Bethlehem Lutheran Church:** 616 Lofts Development is currently redeveloping this former church building into 22 market rate apartments. After languishing for many years with a revolving door of owners and partners, this anchor building will be activated again in 2014.

- **Zoning issues:** The Association systematically reviews all zoning requests in Heritage Hill and determines positions by reviewing the Master Plan of Heritage Hill, soliciting neighbors' opinions, and developing and recommending a position for the Association's Board to debate. These positions are presented to the respective City Boards for their decision making process. In addition to the land use positions already cited, HHA voiced positions on:

- **336 Wealthy SE:** supported the use of this house for use as a 2-unit due to its unique construction. It was built as two houses that share a common wall. The Zoning Appeals Board supported its use as a 2-unit. **200 Union NE, Martha's Vineyard:** Continued to voice support for the redevelopment and parking lot construction at this neighborhood treasure. **Wealthy Street Bakery:** Supported the expanded outdoor seating at yet another neighborhood treasure. **Little Jack's:** Exuberantly supported ICCF's request to demolish this non-descript

building that has been a magnet for graffiti since the store's long abandonment. The store came down easily in early winter to the applause of near and far neighbors. **504 College SE:** Supported the addition of an apartment to be constructed in the carriage house. Use was approved by the City's Zoning Appeals Board. **135 Lafayette NE:** Supported this use as a traditional Bed and Breakfast. The Planning Commission approved its use and it was open for business by year's end. **New construction:** The Association supported the construction of 3 new houses in the neighborhood. The houses are taking shape on 500 block of Madison, 400 block of Union SE and soon to be seen on the 200-300 block of Prospect SE. The neighborhood is in high demand!



- **Saint Mary's Hospital is now Mercy Health Saint Mary's:** Continued to hold neighbors' meetings with representatives to address mutual issues on a semi-annual frequency. Applauded **Phil McCorkle** upon his retirement in mid 2013. His leadership and guidance of the Hospital and his commitment to working with his neighborhood association is laudable and we in Heritage Hill will truly miss his presence. His legacy cements the working relationship we have and we look forward to new beginnings with his predecessor, Bill Manns. Neighbors meet with the new CEO in late October and discussed our shared practices and spaces.



- **Mary Free Bed:** Continued to meet with representatives on its addition and continue to express the need for an active facade with both pedestrian access and scale on any new construction as it is crucial for the safety and walkability of this visible institutional campus. The current construction site was altered so that an active development at the Wealthy and Jefferson intersection can happen in the future.

- **Schools:** Educational choices continued to expand in 2013 within and beyond Grand Rapids Public Schools for Heritage Hill children and parents. **The Association strongly encourages exploring** and finding a good fit for your family. Investigating and comparing school options is a lot easier than moving and leaving the neighborhood!

- **Central Campus Network** - Met with the principals and administrators of the schools on the Central Campus. Central is now Innovation Central and most all of GRPS specialty high schools are located within its historic walls and marble steps. The GR Montessori program is solely housed at this campus (K-12). GRPS representative Gideon Sanders has been attending and interacting at each of the Association's Board meetings.
- **Child Discovery Center** - Continued the Association's connection with this center that is alive with children and supporters once again.
- Reviewed monthly **Grand Rapids Zoning and Planning Department** agendas for issues affecting the neighborhood.
- Maintained **communication network** with each of our neighboring hospitals, colleges and universities, institutions, and neighborhood associations.

CRIME PREVENTION AND NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZING

As always personal safety in our homes and on our streets is a top priority for residents. Everyone wants to be safe in their homes and apartments and our blocks should be a safe haven. We want to live in a neighborhood that allows us to feel a part of the community. A community with neighbors who have similar values and with neighbors who work together to achieve desired results. The Heritage Hill Association works with neighbors on identifying issues and meeting as groups to develop and carry out collective action plans. We also work with hundreds of individuals and draw them into our community.

- **Block Club Support:** When **College NE neighbors** got fed up with a large rental home that was seriously deteriorating they asked HHA for help. Staff met with the group and worked with them to develop their action plan. By late fall their "plan" had done its work. The house has a new roof, is scraped and partially primed, a

new porch has been constructed and the two story garage has undergone the same. The building has been registered as a rental and has a certification for the first time in years. Neighbors worked diligently with city staff, HHA staff and the **North College Block Club** and did not give up until they saw results. College Avenue NE neighbors achieved their own miracle.

- **Other Housing issues:** various blocks assisted with disturbances related to **noise** and **overcrowding;** addressed a problem that included **drugs, violence and fraud that ended peacefully;** **Walnut tree** was sold by a tenant without owners' knowledge to a company that cut it down and took it away to sell for the lumber. It's true!
- **Other Crimes Addressed:** Prospect SE: **chronic disturbances** resolved with an arrest; **prowler problem** resolved with building security survey security improvements and **parties creating disturbances** resolved;
- **Consumers Powerful:** Coordinated another meeting with Consumers Reps and neighbors whose power surges, arcs and outages caused significant and expensive repairs without any hope that it would not happen again. Our work in 2012 helped get one large south end area problem resolved but more south and north end neighbors come forward with complaints. We have yet to have a final resolution with the newer problems but will work to address them this spring if neighbors will contact us. It can be a challenge dealing with a public utility.
- **Graffiti:** Quickly removing graffiti sends a positive message. When it cropped up at a church in the north end of the Hill and on several State Street buildings throughout 2013 we made sure to contact owners and got it removed. Neighbors reported it to us (and to the city at 456-3666).
- **State Street Business District:** It is always on our front burner and we have had many successes with keeping panhandling down and graffiti off. The near future is looking bright with the development of new housing at 345 State Street.
- **The Stuyvesant:** A rash of robberies last spring was interrupted when HHA notified police of possible connection to a local group and asked for added police support. More excitement to come with the rehabilitation of the entire building by the new owner and management.
- **Crime Stats:**
 - **Burglary Down:** The numbers in Heritage Hill of residential burglaries in 2013 have dipped to 15 from an average of 31 between 2010 and 2012. Of the 15 burglaries of homes last year, **five were through unlocked doors.** There were 45 thefts from yards, porches, and open garages (larcenies). That number has gone up a bit from an average of 39 during those same years. **Tips:** Lock up home and apartment doors, put away tools, bikes, and expensive toys in a locked basement, garage, or shed.
 - **Vehicle Crime Up and Down:** Thefts of vehicles are down by one incident from an average of 9 per year but thefts of auto parts or of valuables inside vehicles are up; we are at 86 incidents for 2013, up from an average of 63 over the last three years. **Tips:** Don't leave *anything* in your car/truck; even change or cigarettes can cost you a broken window.
 - **Drug related incidents:** Drug stats are up a little bit to a total of 28 total incidents that include 26 instances of possession and one each of sales and use. The stats are 20 for possession of marijuana, three for crack, and one each for heroin, cocaine and a synthetic drug. This is a huge improvement from the past when drug sales were high and violence was too. Heritage Hill and the city are much safer now.
 - **Violent Crime:** Personal Safety is our top priority and this year we saw a reduction from an average of 62 incidents of all types of violence to 33.
 - 3 Criminal sexual assaults
 - 2 Aggravated assaults (family)
 - 9 Non-aggravated assaults (non-family)
 - 33 Assault and battery simple (domestic)
 - 0 Murders
 - 0 Manslaughters
 - 1 Attempted manslaughter

Domestic violence is the most frequent assaultive behavior. We will focus part of our crime prevention efforts on bringing this number down in 2014. Thankfully none of the sexual assaults was of the most serious type (CSC I). While non-aggravated is less violent, it is not acceptable either.

- **Court Watch:** When a criminal case arrest is made, HHA occasionally provides comments to the judge or works with a victim or witness. This year staff attended a number of hearings on a child neglect case. Other cases involved bringing cases to the GRPD detectives. We did this with the case of a tenant who advertized the apartment he lived in and “rented” it to a dozen unsuspecting individuals for a great price. He took their first month’s rent and deposit (\$1200.) and eventually fled. HHA was able to put a stop to his “fake” renting by posting a warning sign on the door the building (where we know he would see it). That is when the suspect left *everything* behind and fled. **A warrant is still out for his arrest.** The building owner was very grateful that we alerted him to what was happening and victims were very sad to find out their money was gone – at least until the suspect is caught.
- **Home Security and Personal Safety:** The Association trains residents in personal safety and home security in order to keep assaultive crime down. In 2013 assaults of all types were down from an average of 62 to 33; a significant reduction. This year we assisted five neighbors with better security through our **free home/apartment security surveys**. We checked for any ways an intruder could find a quick and quiet entry. We provided recommendations that would prevent illegal entry. There are many simple tricks that we know will make your home or building less vulnerable to a break-in. We met with one owner after his tenant had a burglary and he installed all the city code required locks on windows and doors. His tenant was very grateful and felt much safer.
- **Community Building:** Last spring the **Heritage Hill Association** joined with **Easthills, Eastown and Baxter neighborhoods** to host a joint **Block Rep Round Table**. Well-known and talented neighbors and staff from each area hosted ten round table discussions on all types of issue and projects that have been successful for them. The best part was meeting and talking with neighbors from other areas that have the common issues and some who live on the same street but in different neighborhoods. Our Second Annual Round Table is planned for April for any and all neighborhood activists. More information will come in the next Herald.
- **Tenants and Rental Owners:** We work with both on a daily basis. We have assisted tenants with getting security deposits back after moving out, getting owners/managers to make repairs and other eviction/lease issues. The Association is a founding member of the **Kent County Renter’s Alliance** which provides free legal assistance to tenants four times a month. We also work with **rental owners** and often contact them about activities at their buildings that they may be unaware of. This year we alerted owners to 25 issues of concern. Most rental owners are appreciative of the information. The most common issues that we help resolve are: loud parties, trash build ups, tall grass/weeds, exterior building violations, sofas and other household goods in yards after move-outs, garbage bins not pulled off street after pick up day. This saves owners from getting a notice from the city and the associated city fines.
- **E-Alerts and Updates:** E-mails to residents come out as needed and alert neighbors to potential threats and ways to take action. They also **reinforce a sense of community among neighbors**. We alerted neighbors to bike thefts, a rash of robberies, panhandlers going door-to-door, suspicious activity, mail and package thefts and other issues last year. We also provide tips on what to do about the problems or how to prevent the problems with mini-tutorials in the alerts. Some who have been getting these for ten years must be sick of reading advice about not leaving valuables in vehicles but new neighbors need to know. **If you live in the Hill and want to get the E-Updates go to our website at heritagehillweb.org and sign up.**
- **The Hiker Memorial:** When alerted by a neighbor that there was a proposal to move the Hiker statue located in Foster Park at Cherry, State and Madison SE out of the Hill, we quickly got the word out to residents. Response was quick and we passed it along to our city commissioners. After discussion with many involved at the city and with the proponent it was evident that there was little support. The issue has died for the time being.

- **What Works in Community Organizing:** The magic is in the excellent and long term relationship that neighborhood associations throughout the city have with the **Grand Rapids Police Department**, with our **City Commissioners** and with **City staff**. From the **Community Development Department** through **Public Works, Planning, Code Enforcement, Historic Preservation and the Fire Department** – we are a team that includes **Block Reps and neighbors** who work with their neighborhood associations. Long term City staff like **Connie Bohatch, James Hurt, Karen Larsen, Virginia Million, Rhonda Baker, Suzanne Schulz, Todd Toffery, Police Chief Kevin Belk** and our **Community Police officers like Kristen Gibbons** work with us day in and out. There are so many others that deserve this recognition. This “team” that we are all a part of is why Grand Rapids works.

Parking/Traffic/Street Construction:

- **Parking and traffic concerns** continue to be issues for neighbors, primarily in the north end but also pockets of concern in the mid and south end of Heritage Hill. However a new tool is available now! **Residential Permit Parking** is now available to blocks that can meet requirements. See related article on page .
- Monitored/assisted with a variety of information and concerns regarding the neighborhood sewer replacement projects. More work is coming in 2014 for State Street, the 0-100 blocks of College SE, and Union SE.

Neighborhood Promotion/Fund Development:

- Organized and orchestrated the annual **Weekend Tour of Homes** that showcased 8 private homes and 2 public buildings. Recruited **237 volunteers** to staff the homes and put out the welcome mat to 2,700 guests.
- Organized the sixth annual **Garden Tour** that united gardeners with Heritage Hill garden hosts. This event showcases the variety of urban garden that is a growing and passionate movement in Heritage Hill.
- Compiled and published 6 issues of the **Heritage Herald** and distributed to **4,800 neighbors** and posted at our website.
- Compiled, produced and provided **apartment listings** at the HHA office and website.
- Organized the **Heritage Hill Night Out Picnic** at the Central High campus in August. The bouncy house was a huge hit. Look for the picnic to occupy the Pleasant Park that will hopefully be open in time.
- Organized the annual **Heritage Hill Neighborhood-Wide Yard Sale Day** in June, 2013 - another passionate event!
- Had great fun organizing all aspects of the now annual wine, beer tasting, art auction -- **WHAM** event.
- Texas Hold-em - Staffed 4 gaming events at TJ's Game Room throughout 2013.

Reduced Office Hours in 2013: Due to budget restraints, the HHA Board reduced staff hours and the office began closing on Fridays throughout 2013. The Association struggles as most non-profits and businesses in these economic times. Until additional resources can be tapped, the Association will continue to serve you as best as we can with limited staff hours. The Association Board has focused on its institutional neighbors to help support the work of Heritage Hill for the same reasons that our residents support our annual pledge drive -- we all contribute to and share the benefits of this vital area. A few of our major boundary neighbors have generously contributed and we will continue to work to hopefully realize full participation.

Plus: Handled 1000's of calls and requests regarding a multitude of quality of life issues in Heritage Hill

And we continue working with you in 2014 ... We welcome all new neighbors in 2013 and encourage you to get active in your neighborhood. We have a place for you!