



on the
mount

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2016 **Fall Issue**

'Our first house' – Investing in the community

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On the cover – Daniel Dunn and Kelly Michalides, the new owners of a rehab on Beltzhoover Avenue, with their dog, Macks. See their story on page 5.



MOUNT WASHINGTON
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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*The Mount Washington Community Development Corporation's mission is to bring together residents and business owners to cultivate growth, development and investment toward an even stronger and more livable community. We are a non-profit, catalyst organization, seeking to **inspire, nurture and transform** our neighborhood.*



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On the Mount

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A note from Breen Masciotra, Board President

As 2016 rolls from summer into fall, transition also continues to be a theme at Mount Washington CDC. As is our organizational tradition, MWCDC is gearing up for its annual change in board leadership. As residents of the Mount Washington community, you are invited to participate in the organization as a member. It's easy to sign up at www.mwcdc.org, and there's no charge for membership.

New board members will be elected on October 20 and take their seats on November 1. Most will serve a three-year term. As members of the MWCDC Board of Directors, these community members will give significant time and energy to ensuring that MWCDC continues to fulfill its mission. Board members' primary tasks are to 1) set the direction for the organization and 2) ensure its health by following through on programs in service of the mission.

As you may recall from my letter in the last *On The Mount*, MWCDC has renewed its focus on economic development programs. Every day, our talented staff continues the work of cultivating development and investment in our business districts and highest-need residential areas. At the same time, our board continues to look at the big picture in order to determine the path that will best ensure that MWCDC is able to continue this work as long as it's needed.

The boards of non-profit organizations do a lot of work behind the scenes to keep their organizations going. Fortunately, in community-based organizations like MWCDC, there are ways in which community members can provide support to board members. Residents, as well as business and property owners, can help not only by volunteering for events and service projects, but also by participating in MWCDC's Economic Development and Emerald View Park committees. These bi-monthly meetings are opportunities for staff and board members to collect focused feedback from community stakeholders – and that is extremely valuable.

This is my last letter for *On the Mount*, and that is bittersweet for me. After seven years on our board, I am leaving the organization in good hands as it approaches the threshold of important changes. It is only through the combined strengths of our staff, board, and community that MWCDC will continue its important work. As a resident of this community, that gives me nothing but hope.

Best regards,

Breen



Prior to its sale, MWCDC board members and partners celebrated a successful rehab at the Beltzhoover Avenue home featured on our cover.



One house at a time...

MWCDC spearheading local rehab effort

They're all over Pittsburgh: blighted properties whose owners have moved out, stopped making repairs, and owe thousands of dollars in liens and back taxes.

Here in Mount Washington, MWCDC is tackling this problem head on, working within both the public and private sectors to make these houses livable once again – and create affordable options for homebuyers.

“The City of Pittsburgh has a program that makes these properties available to community groups that are committed to improving their neighborhoods but lack the financial resources to invest a lot of money themselves,” says MWCDC Interim Executive Director Laura Guralnick.

“Our role is pivotal in the local process,” explains Laura. She says that after a house has been vacant and tax delinquent for long enough – sometimes for years – and has not sold at a Treasurer’s Sale, MWCDC is given the opportunity to acquire it for rehabilitation. In fact, there are more than 20 properties on a rehab “wish list” of sorts that continues to be closely tracked by its Economic Development Committee.

“We act as intermediaries to obtain the properties and take proposals from qualified developers who share our goals and mission,” she continues. “They must have the capacity and creativity to return these structures to productive use.”

MWCDC has a detailed housing plan in place that is used to identify areas of the neighborhood for both private and public redevelopment. A list is maintained of blighted houses in the area and, when one becomes available, the Economic Development Committee initiates an in-depth “Request for Proposals.”

The committee, made up entirely of Mount Washington community residents, created this process and defined the criteria that are used to assess the qualifications of potential developers.

Most importantly, developers must be experienced in home renovations with a track record of similar successful projects in blighted areas. For each new parcel, they are required to submit a detailed construction plan with an estimate of all related costs (such as financing, labor, materials, maintenance, etc.).

The chosen developer must have also demonstrated the ability to conform to a timely construction schedule. Because these properties have been vacant eyesores for so long, MWCDC requires the developer to get the project up and running – and completed – quickly.



Focusing on specific neighborhoods

Many of the targeted properties are located in the Estella section – one of 16 “micro-neighborhoods” identified in the community – that extends through the southeast corner of Mount Washington. A 2010 MWDC study showed that it had the most code violations, most foreclosures, lowest median housing prices and densest population. What grew out of that study was a plan for direct MWDC intervention that is now starting to come to fruition.

A case in point was a blighted, single-family house on Beltzhoover Avenue that was in the MWDC acquisition pipeline for more than two years. Since being identified as a potential rehab site in 2012, this house has been transformed by Chris Namiotka, a private developer, into a home with great curb appeal. The bright blue facade and crisp white trim give the exterior a cheerful, welcoming appearance, while the inside has been tastefully updated to reflect the original charm of the house.

Chris estimates that her company, Socrates Realty, has fixed up about 20 homes in the city over the past 13 years, many of them in the Mount Washington area. She enjoys the challenge of taking on rehab projects in mixed housing neighborhoods with potential for growth. “I really like this area,” she says. “It’s a homey part of town that feels like a real community.”



A “before” picture of Daniel and Kelly’s house on Beltzhoover Avenue

‘Our first house’ – A rehab success story

Daniel Dunn and Kelly Michalides, proud new owners of the Beltzhoover Avenue house, are excited to be part of the transformation of a home – and a neighborhood. They had viewed more than 20 houses in eight months. Then, the first day this house came on the market, their real estate agent took them for a tour.

“We walked in the door and knew right away that this was our house,” says Daniel. “It was better than any place we had seen.” They made an offer the very next morning and moved in at the end of August.

Their accepted bid was above the asking price, which came as no surprise to Greg Panza, the listing agent and design consultant for Socrates Realty on this rehab project: “We are seeing a strong, healthy market for these types of homes in Mount Washington. Even after this house sold, I kept getting inquiries about it — which had never happened before.”

Another house that Chris Namiotka rehabbed on Southern Avenue sold just as fast as this one, she says, and Daniel and Kelly are thrilled that she has purchased the eyesore next door to them as her next undertaking.

(Continued on next page)

One house at a time...

A public model at work in the community

Many people may be surprised to know that housing rehabs are also prevalent in the public domain. In fact, more than 250 substandard properties around the city have been fixed up in the past four years under the supervision of the Pittsburgh Housing Development Corporation, a non-profit subsidiary of the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Just a stone's throw from the completed Beltzhoover rehab, ownership of 86 Craighead Street – a blighted duplex also in the Estella micro-neighborhood – was recently transferred from MWCDC to PHDC, which has hired contractors and obtained funding for the work. Renovation costs are mostly provided by community-based lenders and private grants, and a financially successful rehab by a non-profit will optimally break even on expenses.

When this renovation is completed, the two-unit structure will be owner occupied on one side and rented out on the other to help the homebuyers cover the cost of their mortgage.

“Our focus is solely on home ownership,” says PHDC Manager David Howe. He adds that, with housing prices skyrocketing in the East End, “there is a need for solid, affordable housing stock in Mount Washington. We definitely see this as a burgeoning market.”

David explains that, by working with local community organizations such as MWCDC that steer them to abandoned properties, PHDC is pursuing a “rehab to resale” development model to improve neighborhoods and provide affordable housing for first-time homeowners. He says the ideal buyer for these homes is at or below the median income for the community (about \$45,000 for a two-person household).

An investment in the future

As Daniel and Kelly settle into their new home, they look forward to checking out the local restaurant scene and walking their dog in Emerald View Park nearby. “Even when we lived in Green Tree, we would come to hike the trails,” says Kelly. “Now we’re just a block away.”

Enthusiasm for the community and its amenities sealed the deal for the couple, but they are also pragmatic about their decision to sign on the dotted line. Says Daniel, who works as a financial analyst: “We think we’ve made a great investment.”



86 Craighead Street (left) and 14 Kuhn Street are MWCDC initiatives currently being rehabilitated by Pittsburgh Housing Development Corporation.

Support the MWCDC mission

We acknowledge the valuable role you play as a community partner — and hope you will join us in whatever capacity works for you!

Your voice in the community — Become a member

It's easy, it's free, it's your voice in the future of Mount Washington. All residents, homeowners, property owners, businesses, institutions and organizations are invited to join at www.mwcdc.org/membership. By registering online, you will be placed on our mailing list for future MWCDC updates and e-newsletters.

Doing more = greater rewards Represent your neighbors on a committee

Advisory committees meet six times a year to review proposed projects and serve as a first point of contact for public review and approval. As an appointed committee member, you will provide valuable advice to the MWCDC board and staff members on community planning and development. The committees are:

- Economic Development
- Emerald View Park

For more information about joining a committee, contact Laura Guralnick at 412-481-3220 x205



October

3 Neighbors on the Mount Community Meeting

Grandview Bakery • 6-8 p.m.
225 Shiloh

8 Redd Up Day*

30 Halloween Parade on Shiloh*

*Go to <http://notm-mtashington.org> for more details

November

9 Emerald View Park Committee

MWCDC • 5:30-6:30 p.m.
301 Shiloh

16 Economic Development Committee

MWCDC • 6:30-7:30 p.m.
301 Shiloh

Ongoing...

MWCDC Community Forum

3rd Thursday of the month • 7 p.m.
October 20, November 17, December 15
Mount Washington Senior Center
122 Virginia

Zone 3 Public Safety Council

3rd Monday of the month • 11 a.m.-Noon
October 17, November 21, December 19
Police Station • 830 E. Warrington

Board elections on October 20

New members of the MWCDC Board of Directors will be elected at the next Community Forum Meeting to be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday, October 20 at the Mount Washington Senior Center, 122 Virginia Avenue.

To view the ballot of candidates and read their personal statements, go to our website – www.mwcdc.org – for more information.

All current members of MWCDC are eligible to vote for board members. (Membership enrollment for this board election closed on September 20.)

Final farewell to On the Mount

As a cost-cutting measure, this will be the last printed issue of *On the Mount*.

Our plan is to communicate important information through the MWCDC website and an e-newsletter in 2017, and we are building a database of e-mail addresses.

If you would like to receive news updates electronically, please sign up at www.mwcdc.org.



Follow me to **Bigham Street**

A primary focus of MWDC is business development and, especially, the promotion of small businesses located in Mount Washington.

One of our biggest challenges is this: If you say “Mount Washington” to tourists – or even Pittsburghers from other parts of the city – they will predictably think of the Incline or the Overlook, but may not have an understanding of the robust business districts that lay behind those attractions.

As a result, we have been examining ways to broaden public perception of our community and facilitate practical solutions to let visitors know, “Hey, there’s much more over here...AND around the corner...AND down this street.”

Working with the City of Pittsburgh Department of Public Works, MWDC was instrumental in the recent placement of 12 colorful “wayfinding” signs on and around the neighborhood that direct people off Grandview Avenue to the Shiloh and Bigham Street shops.

Because the Bigham business district is smaller – and further off the beaten path – we are featuring their establishments by way of an introduction to future patrons, as well as giving a shout out to those who already count them as local faves. (See the list of Shiloh Street businesses on page 5.)

The five Bigham Street shops consist of the Bigham Tavern, plus four storefronts across the street that are leased to the proprietors by the adjacent Chatham Village. The storefront shops were built in the 1930s as a convenient way for village residents to have many of their shopping and service needs met within a one-block area. Originally there was a general store, a pharmacy, a barbershop – and even a family doctor’s office.

Patricia Boutique @ 326

When Patricia Goettel decided to downsize from an expansive career as a fashion maven and retail clothing entrepreneur, the Bigham Street space was a “perfect fit” for her new venture.

Now in its sixth year, the boutique is mainly an appointment-only “gallery” featuring one-of-a-kind clothing and fiber art pieces that reflect the owner’s refined aesthetic. Her specialty, says Patricia, is “great white shirts and little black dresses.” Our fashion



Patricia Goettel

forward readers may have patronized one of her former shops – Rodier Paris in Station Square, Plan B Boutique in Mt. Lebanon and Patricia Boutique in Aspinwall. Even though she has cut back in scale, Patricia still goes on buying trips to New York, Paris and Hong Kong (where her daughter lives).



J.J. Bosley, CPA @ 404

J.J. Bosley started his tax and accounting consulting business here in 1978. He is assisted by his wife, Margaret, who is the office manager, and five staff accountants.

As a long-time resident of Chatham Village, having a business right in the neighborhood has created a loyal following for J.J. among the locals. However his clientele – individuals, small businesses, non-profits, estates and trusts – draws from many other states and foreign countries, as well.

J.J.'s speciality is helping clients (especially small businesses) navigate the choppy waters of IRS regulations in order to meet their tax compliance obligations.

“We try to guide businesses through the start-up phase and provide an interface between them and the government,” he says with the confidence of someone speaking from years of experience. “They don’t teach this in school.”

Bigham Tavern @ 321

The tavern is an historic neighborhood staple on Mount Washington, where operation is believed to have begun as early as 1910. Commonly referred to as The Bigham or BT's, its current owners are five long-time residents of Mount Washington who set out to create a welcoming, family friendly gathering place in their community. The Bigham strives to be the place where locals and tourists alike stop by for lunch, dinner and a lively late night bar scene. They enjoy an extensive beer selection, alongside “bar fare with a flair.”

The tavern has built a reputation as a place for fabulous wings and burgers, and has accumulated numerous “BEST” awards from the readers of *Pittsburgh Magazine* and *Pittsburgh City Paper*.

The staff has grown from five to more than 70 in six short years, and all of them will proudly tell you to “Go Bigham or Go Home.”

(Continued on next page)

BT's owners (from left): Terry Malsch, Joseph & Jessica Rewis, Bradley & Amelia Yoder



Follow me to **Bigham Street** and **Shiloh, too** →



Vicki & Keith Wormsley (right), and their niece, Jordan Coccaro

Café Cravings @ 402

Enthusiastic *Facebook* reviews confirm that Café Cravings has won the hearts and palates of Pittsburgh foodies who rely on this local establishment to satisfy their most discriminating cravings: “*The best coffee, the best people and the best sandwiches.*” “*Made me want to move to the neighborhood.*” “*Friendly, GREAT latte.*”

Vicki and Keith Wormsley have run the café since 2003, and it is still pretty much a two-person enterprise. Open from early morning to mid-afternoon seven days a week, the café serves up gourmet drinks (coffee, tea, smoothies), breakfast and lunch sandwiches, paninis, soups and salads prepared by Keith, a culinary school graduate.

Vicki describes the 12-seat eatery with indoor and outdoor tables as “small and cozy, like the old days.” She adds: “This is a very supportive community and neighborhood. We love it here.”

Steel City Salon @ 328

We will always be, after all, the Steel City, but the hair salon by that name atop Mount Washington is no throwback. It’s quite a compliment, in fact, that tunnel-averse Pittsburgh residents venture over and through the hills – from the north, south, east and west – to avail themselves of Steel City Salon’s cutting edge styles.

For the past 15 years, owner Emilee Russell and her staff of one full-time and two part-time stylists have offered cuts, hair coloring and highlights to those seeking contemporary – and reasonably priced – salon services.

Emilee says she “loves” her Chatham Village location and the salon’s proximity to the other businesses on Bigham: “It’s a nice little one-stop community and we all support and refer clients to each other. If my customers want to grab a coffee or sandwich, I just send them down the street.”



Emilee Russell and her customer, Martha Clark

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