



March 2014

ILLUMINATIONS

quarterly publication of the Historical Society of University City

The Parkview Gardens Story

Upcoming Program

In the Historical Society's final spring program, David Linzee will give an illustrated talk based on his booklet, *Parkview Gardens: Its Rise and Fall and Rise*. It's the newest in a series of booklets published by the Historical Society on the neighborhoods of University City. David has been the editor of *Illuminations* since 2009 and of the *Parkview Gardens Pacer* since 1997. He is a longtime resident of the neighborhood.

Parkview Gardens, otherwise known as the North Loop, is a century old. The oldest part of the neighborhood was laid out in 1913 and the first buildings were put up in 1914. David will tell about the St. Louis Police "invasion" of Delmar Racetrack, the great North Parkview auction, the Heman Avenue follies, the Vernon Avenue sit-in protest and the firemen's strike. He will also explain why Von Versen Avenue changed its name to Enright and how bingo saved the neighborhood. He'll be happy to sign booklets, on sale for \$6. Refreshments will be served. *The program is at 7 pm April 8 at the University City Public Library.*

Century Homes, 1914-2014

Historical Society plaques

University City was growing quickly in the teens of the last century, which means that many houses and other buildings in Cunningham Park, Parkview Gardens, Parkview, University Heights and other neighborhoods qualify for Century Home plaques in 2014. The Historical Society has identified the structures using building permits, architectural inventories and other documents, and is now compiling a list of current owners. Letters inviting them to apply for a century plaque will go out soon.



Architectural detail from 705 Interdrive in Parkview Gardens

Docents Needed

At City Hall

About 20 third-graders from the College School in Webster Groves, accompanied by teachers and parents, visited City Hall March 10. Historical

Society Archivist Sue Rehkopf showed them the city model in the main floor lobby, E.G. Lewis's office on the second floor and the City Council chambers atop the building. The children were particularly interested in the spiral staircase to the searchlight and in comparing the views

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A Message from the President

As we "dig out" of this most interesting winter, we look forward to the repair of the Gates of Opportunity. The Request for Proposals (RFP) should be sent out shortly. The Historical Society asked the Historical Preservation Commission to examine the RFP, and we are waiting to hear if they found anything that needed to be clarified.

We are waiting with baited breath to learn what the new owner of the Delmar-Harvard School buildings has planned. The Annex --north of City Hall-- is another building which needs to be repurposed. There is certainly a lot going on in and around our Civic Plaza.

We've had a surge of interest in tours of City Hall, for which we provide docents, frequently with the help of City

Hall employees. We have three adult groups booked in the next few months, and on March 10th, Sue Rehkopf and David Linzee led a tour for students from The College School. If you have a group that would be interested, the tour lasts about an hour, and we charge \$2 per person. This could be a wonderful afternoon or evening activity if you combine it with a meal at one of the many fine restaurants in The Loop. And you'd only have to park once!

Our Century Plaque program is going well; approximately fifty homes reach that mark this year, and we'll be notifying their owners soon. If you think your home qualifies, don't hesitate to contact us.

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from the windows to historical photographs. Mayor Shelly Welsch would like to see a program of regular tours set up, and anyone who has visited City Hall knows that the building is imposing and full of architectural and historical interest. If any of our members are interested in becoming docents, we would be delighted to hear from you. Email Sue Rehkopf at ucityhistory@hotmail.com or call David Linzee at (314) 727-5836.

From Then to Now

Henry continues story

Former City Manager Charles Henry has been hard at work. He has taken the booklet we published last year, *A History of Community Sustainability*, and expanded it by discussing our city from the years the booklet covered (1959-1975) through the present. His new work is titled *Saving a Middle Class, Multi-Racial American City*. The book is available on Amazon. We congratulate Mr. Henry, and are honored that, although he left the area for Oregon, he still takes great pride in University City .

State of the City, 2014

Mayor and City Manager report

President Eleanor Mullin welcomed guests to the fourth annual State of the City on March 4 in the City Council chambers atop City Hall. She announced that about 30 homeowners had already ordered Century plaques and that many houses in University City will reach the 100-year mark in the next few years. Young volunteers from the Lieberman Center provided much-appreciated assistance with welcoming guests and passing out brochures.

City Manager Lehman Walker said that government's goal is to balance the budget while continuing to provide the services citizens expect and deserve. At present, finances are in good shape, and the city has built up a \$16 million reserve fund. The city is addressing a backlog of infrastructure repairs. The police department has 98 officers, four having been added last year. The fire department has 46 fulltime employees, with two being added. The new firehouse at Westgate and Vernon is open. U. City has very high quality housing stock and 800 businesses. The latest census showed a population decline of about 5 percent. This represents not vacant buildings but smaller households, but it negatively affects city revenue. The largest source of revenue is the sales tax. Like many communities, we have seen a decline in the assessed value of properties since the slump of 2008. The budget process is underway. Meetings will be held in each ward over the next three months. The proposed budget has no reduction in services, no increase in taxes. It provides a 2 percent COLA for employees and increases funds for infrastructure repairs, because streets,

sidewalks and trees need attention. The proposed budget shows a small surplus. For the future, he's hopeful about upgrading the police station, building a new aquatics center and enhancing U City's bikeability and walkability. The greatest threat to our finances is a change from pool tax to point of sale tax in St. Louis County's distribution of sales tax money.

Mayor Shelley Welsch, unopposed for a second term, said that E.G. Lewis would be pleased to see that a progressive approach to governance has returned to the city he founded. "This administration has made great strides in development," she said, pointing to the Lofts under construction on east Delmar, and Vanguard Crossing apartments and Walgreen's on west Delmar. Habitat for Humanity has built nine houses in the northeast part of the city. The District and Trilogy developments contain 50 acres of revamped apartments. Three hundred new businesses have opened. She is hopeful that the Farmer's Market from Clayton will soon be moving to Market in the Loop and that cooperation with Olivette will continue in developing the I-170 area. The Bike/Walk Plan has been approved by the City Council. She awaits release of Federal funds to build the trolley. The high-speed fiber optic cable that is part of the trolley project promises to bring an employment boom to the area. In upcoming events, The Arts and Letters Commission is planning a literary festival in the loop. The Chamber of Commerce

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will again holds its popular Taste of U City evening in May. There is a summer youth employment program for work in city departments. Movies in the Park will return this summer. Fair U City will be held in September. "I focus on involving people in the life of the community," the Mayor said. There are two new commissions, on seniors and youth. She is seeking volunteers to work on a concert featuring local choirs and bands and on U. City applications for All-American City and America in Bloom. She'd like to see a formal program for tours of City Hall; the demand exists. She's still enthusiastic about a community visioning process, where citizens make a long-range plan for U. City.

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Cakes in the Loop

Three of the "Cakeway to the West" cakes are in the Loop. A total of 250 fiberglass birthday cakes designed and decorated by local artists have been set out around the city to celebrate the 250th anniversary of St. Louis' founding. Across Delmar from City Hall is one created by David Jackson. One by Henryk Ptasiewicz is in front of the Tivoli Theatre. The third, by Gina Harmon, stands near the Chuck Berry statue on Ackert Park Plaza. A full list of locations and other information about anniversary events is at stl250.org.

Berry, the rock and roll legend who still performs frequently at Blueberry Hill, is one of the residents profiled in the Missouri History Museum's 250 in 250: a Year-Long Exhibition Commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the Founding of St. Louis. The exhibition tells the story in 50 people, 50 places, 50 moments and 50 objects. Admission is free. Full information at mohistory.org