

COVENTRY



VILLAGE NEWS

January 2001

THE NEWSLETTER OF COVENTRY VILLAGE NEIGHBORS INC.

From the President's Pen

Before my wife and I moved to Coventry, we considered a house in Cleveland, on East 89th Street between Chester and Hough Avenues. After many thoughtful hours, Michele determined that she would not feel comfortable in that home when I was away. We abandoned the idea, but have never forgotten the building. A short while later, we selected our house on Washington Boulevard and over the last ten years have rehabilitated most of it. Now, (for better or worse) it is our home. The house on East 89th, however, remains the unsatiated lover. Always in our thoughts and continually beckoning us as we drive down Chester Avenue.

This is a magnificent house. A Victorian palace, with an onion capped turret at the corner. Like Simone Signoret in one of her last movies, "Madame Rosa"; age has not treated this elegant structure kindly. The colorful roof looks worse and worse upon each passing. Recently, we noticed that some of the delicate gingerbread has started to fall from place, and finally, last month, the grand oak front door was boarded over with plywood.

Last year, after what seemed like an eternity of unrequited desire, my wife believed she could call this place home and feel safe while doing so. We both felt we could return this mistress back into the younger Simone Signoret that in 1959 enchanted Lawrence Harvey in "Room at the Top". We called our real estate agent to find out if anything could be done. Unlike Cleveland Heights, there is nothing prohibiting an agent from approaching a Cleveland owner to find out if they are willing to sell their property. She wrote a letter, but we never heard a thing. My wife was not ready to give up. She talked to the Cleveland Restoration Society and the County Auditor's office. What she learned ultimately did discouraged us. The house has changed owners a number of times over the last few years. The sale price escalating, despite the fact that the property continues to deteriorate. Someone was playing a game to falsely inflate the value of the home. The likelihood of our ever being able to rescue it had almost totally disappeared. In the film, Mr. Harvey ultimately leaves the married Ms. Signoret and she soon dies in a tragic automobile accident. Life imitates art.

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CLAUDETTE WOODARD AND VIRGIL BROWN, JR. WIN LOCAL ELECTED POSITIONS

Claudette Woodard has won her quest to represent our neighborhood in the Ohio House of Representatives. Virgil Brown, Jr. defeated the incumbent and eight other challengers to earn the right to represent our area in the State School Board. If you did not have an opportunity to join us during the September Coventry Neighbors meeting, you missed hearing their positions and intended direction. No matter. You can still contact them with your concerns.

Representative Claudette Woodard
1638 Crest Avenue
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44121

Virgil E. Brown, Jr.
3106 Eastwick Drive
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

WANT TO SAVE A TREE AND STILL GET YOUR COVENTRY NEWS?

We have created a Coventry Neighbors e-mail listing. A number of members have already asked us to switch their method of Coventry News delivery. If you enjoy receiving e-mail better than snail-mail, we can begin sending your copy of the Coventry Neighbor News using this method. If you would like us to change, drop us an e-mail message! You can contact Jeff Dross at his new e-dress: ladrosseur@core.com

JOIN US AT OUR NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, January 9
7:40
Coventry Library

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This summer we took another stab at a different house. A modern classic residence located in Cleveland Heights was available for sale. We toyed with the idea for a short while, but ultimately decided that the monetary difference between that house and ours would not allow us an adequate amount of money to properly polish this younger gem back to the luster it so richly deserves. There was one other problem. We were not equally enamored with this International benchmark. I was more enchanted than my wife. It wasn't the same as our mutual desire for East 89th. We abandoned this prospect almost as quickly as it started.

I guess I felt more comfortable stopping the pursuit of this newer house than our old friend on East 89th. Someone would quickly snap-up this house. It was in a great neighborhood with good rooms and layout. It would be well cared for and properly ushered back to glory.

My thoughts and concerns about houses and preservation were again kicked to the fore as we entered the holiday season. Three events collided and reminded me that my wife and I are not in the majority when it comes to housing choice.

Occasionally, I like to read The New York Times. I look at the Plain Dealer daily and the Sun Press weekly. The Free Times provides me with serious local issue reporting each weekend, but a few times a year I buy and read the Sunday Times. A week before Christmas was such a time. One of the articles that struck me was on the front of the Arts & Leisure section. Apparently, I was wrong about the modern house we ignored this summer. The Times reported that a Modern Architecture, preservation group had been formed; Docomomo (Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighborhoods of the Modern Movement.) Like so many of our historical buildings, the fruit of Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and the great International "skyscrapers" of Manhattan were in danger of demolition. This was not only an American issue. The United States penchant for erasing history was spreading around the globe. Docomomo has chapters in 40 countries. Had I "assumed" too quickly that this interesting piece of modern Cleveland Heights' architecture would find a protective guardian?

Later that day, we decided to visit the new BJ's Wholesale store in Highland Hills (formerly Warrensville Township.) When Michele and I were first married, we lived right in the middle of what is now the "Chagrin Highlands". Our condo has been demolished, the model airplane flying field across the street is gone and the row of country residences was crushed in order to construct this waste of retail space. Our peaceful island of rural life was destroyed so that people could have the opportunity to buy items at inflated prices AND be charged a membership fee for the privilege! It was a sad afternoon sprinkled with partially reconstructed memories and mourning.

Finally, on Christmas Day, I joined my sister at our Mom's house for dinner. This year was slightly different. My sister's son joined us again after a few years absence. As with so many young men, he is currently struggling to find an appropriate place in our tumultuous society. Since we last met and to my sister's dismay, he has apparently gained an interest in hunting. He was surprised and excited to see the small herds of deer that continually pass through my mother's Valley View backyard. Like so many other places in our metropolitan area, deer have started to become an urban reality, foraging in residential backyards instead of what used to be morsel-filled fields.

These three, seemingly unconnected events illustrated to me the error of our approach to living on earth.

As a society, we have determined that it is better to leave the center of our metropolitan circle, the most urban of areas, and allow them to crumble and deteriorate. In turn, we move out to fresh, unspoiled land and construct our homes and Wal-Marts. After we have happily settled-in, we begin to get upset with the intruding wildlife, forgetting that we are in fact the intruders. They (the deer, raccoons, rats, rabbits, moles and possums) were doing just fine before we upset THEIR neighborhood. If there were an "Interspecies World Court", man would be the defendant.

We have used and abused our portion of the landscape. Inadequate laws have failed to protect these valuable assets from the clumsy hands of the abusers. The classic beauty of a Victorian palace on East 89th Street no longer appeals to us. In its stead, we decide that we need to displace some wildlife (substitute farmland if you like) and create a new homestead. Because we have strafed the land, the wildlife cannot move to graze on what was once East 89th and Hough. Instead they are pressed into smaller and smaller plots of land. They don't understand what happened to their vast expanses of land (or the moronic, duplicative architecture, but that is another story) they only know they must eat to survive and prosper. Our selfishness and our lack of proper land use have exacerbated the problem. What was once considered to be the graceful beauty of a deer herd is now looked upon as a marauding pack of varmints out to destroy personal property.

Recently, the state of Ohio has agreed to spend money to widen some of the local Interstates that lead to these newly created urban outposts. Instead of insuring that East 89th Street remains a viable residential area, they have created an escape hatch. More homes are abandoned on an inner city street and a new Outback Steakhouse opens in Medina.

When I was studying Architecture, twenty-five years ago, my classmates and I used to ride around the streets between East 55th and University Circle looking at the marvelous old housing architecture. When my wife and I first discovered this house on East 89th street, there were more neighbor homes

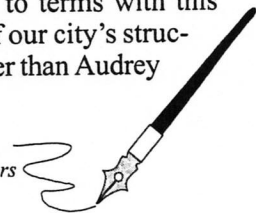
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than currently survive. Each year, less and less of our architectural history survives. That bodes poorly for us in Cleveland Heights and Coventry. We're next. When the streets of Cleveland are scrapped clean, Hudson and Aurora will have larger populations than today. As buildings start to deteriorate in our neighborhood, they will take the place of today's crumbling structures on East 89th Street. To stem the tide, we must convince our state legislators that freeway expansion is foolhardy. We need to clean and reuse the destroyed land, left abandoned throughout the center city and speaking personally, we must ask them to pay special attention to cities and neighborhoods like ours that remain on the cusp. It may be too late to bring large portions and certain areas in Cleveland back to viability, but it is not too late to save Cleveland Heights.

We have a new legislator representing Cleveland Heights in the State House. Claudette Woodard won landslide victory over her opponents. It is time to tell her what we need to protect our investment and our community. Local Municipal Judge Toiler needs better ammunition to deal with those that care little about the "brownfields" they leave behind. We need some assistance in housing maintenance laws. It might be assumed that their crime is victimless, but can the destruction of a neighborhood be any less heinous than the more blatant methods of property destruction?

We need to return to a place where people lived in communities and deer graze in peace; where buildings serve multiple generations and generations learn from their experience; a place where rural life can be sought and enjoyed. This is not a Cleveland Heights issue. If it were, I believe it would have been addressed and solved already. This is not a County issue. Medina and Auburn Township are not affected by rulings in Cuyahoga. It remains a task for the state to address and solve. Failure to come to terms with this important issue will result in more of our city's structures aging like Simone Signoret rather than Audrey Hepburn.

Jeffrey R. Dross
President, Coventry Neighbors



BIRDHOUSE ART SHOW POSTPONED

Because of lack of art entries, the second Birdhouse Art Show was postponed, probably until the spring of 2001. A number of interesting pieces of Birdhouse art were submitted, but not enough to fill the Coventry Library with high-flying art like the first show did. If you were thinking about entering, but hadn't yet finished your "masterwork" there may still be time. Keep your eyes on these pages. We'll be sure to announce the new date for this exciting show.

URBAN OUTFITTERS AND CINEMA GRILLE

Will they or won't they? If rumors and innuendoes were nickels... well, you know the rest.

In our last newsletter, we reported information about the Cinema Grille and retailer Urban Outfitters coming to Coventry. Since that time, the *Plain Dealer* and the *Sun Press* have produced articles detailing information about the outcome of these new neighbors.

As of today's writing, the Cinema Grille looks more certain than Urban Outfitters, but this is only the Editor's opinion. Anything could happen and probably will. Stay tuned. More information is sure to follow!

WE WISH FOR YOU...

Comfort on difficult days,
Smiles when sadness intrudes,
Rainbows to follow the clouds,
Laughter to kiss your lips,
Sunsets to warm your heart,
Gentle hugs when spirits sag,
Friendships to brighten your being,
Beauty for your eyes to see,
Confidence for when you doubt,
Faith so that you can believe,
Courage to know yourself,
Patience to accept the truth,
And love to complete your life.

And if you can't have all that...

Then we wish you enough chocolate
to make it through the tough times....

**THERE IS A WELL-MAINTAINED HOME
IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD.**

**I believe the owners should be commended
for their EXTRA effort.**

(Address)

Your name (optional)

Mail to:

Jeff Dross, President Coventry Neighbors

Cleveland, Heights, OH 44118-2010

Coventry Village News is published by Coventry Neighbors, Inc. The newsletter is distributed free throughout Coventry Village. Mailed subscriptions are available. Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of every month at 7:40 p.m. at the Coventry Village Library, Euclid Heights Blvd. & Coventry Rd.

When you join Coventry Neighbors, Inc. you can be sure of having a voice in shaping your neighborhood's future. Membership includes a subscription to the Coventry Village News.

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c/o Jeff Dross, President c/o Bruce Biddle, Editor

[Redacted contact information]

Individual \$7.50 Family \$10 Senior Citizen \$5

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

ZIP CODE _____ PHONE _____

CNI needs street representatives to communicate with the local neighborhoods and assist with the delivery of the newsletter.

YES! I would like to assist CNI by becoming a CNI representative for my street.

Please return this form with your check to:

COVENTRY NEIGHBORS, INC.
c/o Bob Klemenc

[Redacted address information]

COVENTRY Village News

c/o Bruce Biddle, Editor

[Redacted contact information]