

# Coventry Village News

The Newsletter of Coventry Neighbors, Inc.  
April 2002

## FROM THE PRESENT'S PEN

Like a deathbed plea for forgiveness, the Cleveland Heights Architectural Review Board is attempting to seek repentance for sins of the past.

Amid a political hailstorm, the board allowed the city to enlarge the existing Ice-Skating Rink/Community Building. The elegant and well-placed original structure is now engulfed within a monstrous tragedy that will serve as an aesthetic wart in the middle of our city's forehead for many years. Now that the building has had its grand opening, the board members have no doubt seen it, experienced it and realize what they have wrought. Aesthetically confused, lacking finesse and inappropriately placed, it stands as a constant reminder of government failure.

I am NOT speaking of the controversy that surrounded this construction. I knowingly voted to increase my taxes for this building (and the ancillary rehabilitation's.) I understood that it would be built on the underused and much abused Forest Hills Park. Unlike those who claim we were all duped, I went to the polls, fully armed with facts and made a conscientious decision. Forget all of that nonsense. I instead refer to the approval of a crappy design.

Those opposed to building the Community Center addition on Forest Hills parkland pulled out their political arsenal and went to war. Approval for building the addition was held hostage and delayed almost two years while the activists argued and wrestled with the city. Fights were carried out anywhere an audience could be found. Surrounded by this nonsense, the Architectural Review Board found itself caught in the crossfire. The original make-up of the board stood fast and pushed for design excellence. This delay on top of the activist's efforts was too much for the city to endure. Richard Nixon taught us that despite the resignation of Elliot Richardson and William Ruckelshaus, eventually Robert Bork would rise to the occasion and fire Archibald Cox. Over the corpses of some fallen members, a revised board approved the new design.

The building now sits as a constant reminder of how badly things can go wrong. Despite the political explosions, the board should have remained insulated and charged only with insuring good design. Sure, the place is an instant success because it is a much needed community venue, but that is no excuse for bad design in a city with so little land to develop. Perhaps, it was destined to fail. As soon as the Forest Hills Park supporters raised their voices, panic was introduced into the process and a bad design was inevitable. We will never know.

Admirably, the new board appears determined not to let this happen again. The new Cleveland Heights-University Heights Main Library addition is now set to forgive their transgressions, cleanse their conscience and make communal amends. This is a tough task for one single building. It is a giant burden to place on one architect. It could easily sidetrack the construction of this building as long as the Forest Hills Gang delayed the construction of the Community Center. This time, it may be for the right reasons.

Rafael Viñoly has been hired by the board of the Cleveland Art Museum to add 130,000 square feet of space to the University Circle building. I have attended most of the meetings held over the last year where community opinion has been aired. Everyone agrees that the original 1916 structure is a superb example of architecture and must be preserved. There is also a large group of people that believe the 1971 Breuer Bauhaus addition cannot and should not be touched. (Luckily, no one thinks much of the 1954 addition, hidden away on the west side.) Viñoly's challenge is to blend these two radically different styles into a cohesive home for Cleveland's art. The same task awaits the architect of the CH-UH expansion. As a matter of fact, he might have a more daunting job as he attempts to link two mediocre examples of mid-1900 suburban design. After a half-dozen attempts, the Board sent Architect Dan Meehan back to the drawing board. The CH-UH library has since invited a consortium of local architects and designers to "advise" Meehan as he reworks the design. Anyone who has experience with committee-design is probably clenching their teeth.

While all of this architectural intrigue was going on, a bunch of middle-aged heterosexuals (Cleveland Heights City Council) is preparing to grant same-sex employee benefits to Cleveland Heights workers. Compared with the architectural issue, this has been relatively blasé "non-event". TV news made a big deal over the action because they like to titillate. Councilman, Jimmie Hicks has allowed his collar to get in the way of his duty to ALL of Cleveland Heights' citizens, (perhaps a few suggested re-reads of key bible passages might be in order) but unlike other cities, doing what is right and good and just, comes easily to Cleveland Heights. Gay folks are all around us. They serve in the US Congress, State Legislatures and Municipal offices all around America. They work along side us in our offices and factories and they work for us in the public sector. It is time for us to grant them equal protection and respect. No one would now argue that woman and African-Americans don't deserve the rights they were granted over the last 100 years. There should be no difference with this group.

A few years ago, Ellen DeGeneres decided to tell America that she was a lesbian. It became a cause célèbre. She was featured on the cover of Time Magazine. Ratings on her TV show exploded. She won an Emmy Award for writing about her personal awareness. A few weeks ago Rosie O'Donnell revealed a similar secret. No Time Magazine cover, no ratings explosion, most likely, no Emmy. In a few years, portions of America have learned to accept new differences and move on. Lakewood tried a similar thing a few years ago and failed. Cleveland Heights will succeed. It is our destiny as a progressive city.

Art is important to the residents of Cleveland Heights. The creative process is central to the lives of many. They are aware that exciting, well-designed surroundings enhance life and provide for a vibrant community. Long ago, the citizens of Cleveland Heights realized that living along-side and respecting all peoples was preferable to selective alienation. Through peaceful co-existence, we could show the next generation that prejudice is a fruitless effort and all people are equal. The citizen's priorities are well defined and clearly established. Only in Cleveland Heights could a library design approval process gain more press, letters to the editor and controversy than same-sex benefits to gay city employees. This is the way it should be everywhere. God, I love living in this city!

Jeffrey R. Dross – President, Coventry Neighbors

## **OLYMPIC TORCH COMES THROUGH COVENTRY**

Perhaps you missed it, but there was at least one cold day this winter. On that cool, crisp Sunday afternoon, the Olympic torch traveled through the heart of Coventry on it way to Salt Lake City, Utah. While the advertised time was off by over an hour, an excited crowd stood, froze and waited in anticipation of the coming historical event. Just before sundown, runner and flame jogged up Coventry Road and moved on to Shaker Square. It truly was a historic event and it was nice to see it in our neighborhood.

(insert picture, if desired)

## **COVENTRY WALKING TOUR PLANNED**

Ken Goldberg has agreed to lead a walking tour through the old "Mayfield Heights" district of Cleveland Heights. "Mayfield Heights" was the former name for the Northeast section of Coventry, encompassing Hampshire Road, Superior and Somerton. During the two-hour walk, Mr. Goldberg will draw our attention to area landmarks and architectural points of interest.

Mr. Goldberg is an architectural historian, professional librarian with NOACA, a contributing writer to the [Guide to Cleveland Architecture](#), a ten-year member of the Cleveland Heights Landmark Committee and has served for twelve years on the Heights Improvement Awards Committee. He writes an article about Cleveland Heights history in the city's quarterly publication, [Focus](#) and performs architectural evaluations and exterior color consultations for clients.

If you are interested in joining this informative walk, please contact Jeff Dross at 321-0206 or [ladrossceur@core.com](mailto:ladrossceur@core.com). The cost is \$6.00 each and will be held on either Tuesday May 14, 2002 from 6:30PM to 8:30PM or Saturday May 18, 2002 from 2:00PM to 4:00PM. State your preference when calling or leaving a message. Depending upon response, we are considering additional tours through our neighborhood.

## **COVENTRY SID IN MIDST OF RENEWAL PROCESS**

When the Coventry business owners agreed to increase their taxes to be used on collective projects, they become only the second Special Improvement District (SID) in the state. It has been five years since a majority of property owners took that historic step. Now, as defined by state charter, they must petition the state to renew this arrangement. It appears now that there are enough votes to secure the SID until 2007, when they will need to go through the process again.

The SID has been a strong force for the business district and a good friend to the neighborhood, Coventry School and the library. It is good to know they will be around for the foreseeable future.

## **COVENTRY ROAD STREET IMPROVEMENT PLANNED**

Thanks to the approval of Issue 2 funding, Cleveland Heights has hired architect Paul Volpe to assist in the street improvement of Coventry Road. Starting sometime in July, Coventry Road from its East Cleveland start at Superior Road to Derbyshire Road in Cleveland Heights will be re-paved. The business district area from Mayfield Road to Euclid Heights will see a few additional improvements that should prove to make the strip more appealing to prospective tenants and customers.

Along with new curbs and roadway, the width of Coventry will be made consistent, allowing for the creation of slightly larger sidewalks in many areas. Additional trees will be planted, benches will be added and more public space will be available. After the rework, a gain of nine to eleven on-street parking spaces is expected. Repositioning the pedestrian crosswalk further south (to a location near the existing RTA buss shelter) is also currently being investigated.

Mr. Volpe of City Architecture is well known for his involvement in older urban areas such as ours. He is the architect of the Boulevard townhouses on the corner of Lee Road and Euclid Heights Boulevard and the Villa Carabelli townhouses sitting on the edge of Little Italy, along with many other urban structures. The Coventry SID credits the city and county Engineer Robert Klaiber for helping to make these improvements a reality. Maintenance of a strong

commercial district benefits all of us. This will be nice to see and is long overdue.

## **VACANCIES**

Coventry Road has quite a few vacant buildings now. The Food Co-op, The Wilderness Shop, Arabica's, Portabello's, (Café D'Oro) Chubby Sandwich Shop and the Taj Mahal have all hung Real Estate signs in the window. The Coventry SID reports that each building owner is actively searching for a replacement tenant and hopes that announcements can be made soon. But all is not bleak. Some new neighbors have moved in. Soul Vegetarian recently arrived from Lee Road (don't forget to try the Sunday Brunch!) and a Laundromat has renovated the abandoned CVS pharmacy building. Old friends like Laura Lee Salon (formerly Lee Allen) have renovated their space preparing for a long future in the neighborhood. There is always an ebb and tide in life and Coventry is no different. Renaissance is coming to our community. Stay tuned.

## **HEIGHTS ART COLLABORATIVE**

The Heights Art Collaborative has scheduled two events in the coming months. On Wednesday April 10, 2002, Lillian Kuri, Executive Director of Cleveland Public Art will conduct a slide lecture called, "Public Art: Shaping Cities Around the World." On Thursday June 6, 2002 the Poets' & Writers' League of Greater Cleveland will meet to discuss "Artists in the Neighborhood."

Both will be held at the CH-UH Main Library at 2145 Lee Road at 7:00PM.