

King Neighborhood

Neighborhood News & Events



Portland State University

A 154,000-square-foot Urban Center will connect Portland State University with downtown Portland. A variety of retail businesses also will be located in the Center, utilizing approximately 26,000 square feet of the first floor. The University Plaza will be a public square adjacent to the Urban Center. It will be an ideal transit hub - especially important because PSU is the single largest central city TriMet destination - and will include plans for a light rail station extension.

Business Of The Year

Eugene and Marleen Gott have proven that a small McDonald's Restaurant (on Barbur Boulevard) can be a community asset, not just a place to eat. They are highly customer oriented, greeting customers by name, providing newspapers and other amenities, hiring a Hispanic greeter to assist with the neighborhood's significant Hispanic community. The Gotts are strong supporters of the neighborhood and business associations and don't wait to be asked for assistance with donations, supplies or participation. Their message to middle and high schools students is that employees with good grades get bonuses, while youth who make bad choices and drop out of school, don't get hired.

Model Volunteer

As a teenager, Tonya Dickens found herself involved in gang-related activity and disruptive in school. When she realized she would not graduate with her class, she did an abrupt turnaround, buckled down to work, taking night classes, and became more selective about her associates. Now she is a courageous and feisty advocate for at-risk youth, working with some of Oregon's most hardcore gangsters and prison inmates. She volunteers her time with the Youth Gangs Outreach Program and spends many a weekend night cruising the neighborhood to keep an eye on her clients and other youngsters. She attends the Mayor's regular anti-gang meetings.

Irvington

The Irvington neighborhood is completing its 25-year dream of creating a playground, park and community gathering place for their area that had no other greenspace or noncommercial community center. Volunteers, including design professionals have created a master plan to upgrade the school playfield into a modern, accessible and safe park serving the needs of both the school and the inner-Northeast community. The first phase of this project, which the friends of the park have already begun, will cost \$220,000. Much of the money will come from the sale of engraved bricks, similar to the bricks in Pioneer Courthouse Square downtown, for \$50 apiece.

St. Johns

The Open Meadow Learning Center in the St. Johns neighborhood was named the Alternative Education Program of the Year by the Oregon Assoc. For Alternatives in Education. Carole Smith, the executive director of Open Meadow Learning Center has dedicated 17 years to helping youth reach inside themselves to find the motivation to continue their education, achieve their goals and graduate. Under Carole's leadership, she emphasizes personal responsibility, academics, community, and respect for diversity.

Walnut Park is a community of retail establishments that offer first rate service and Afro-centric items. The retail complex along with the other nearby stores make up the most ethnic diverse business district in the state of Oregon. The facilities of Walnut Park opened in October, 1995. Each year, the proprietors stage an anniversary involving artists, entertainers and children's events in late May or early June. Walnut Park is a complement to the King neighborhood - a model of good support by the private/public sector as well as the community.



Two Plum Garden is the King Neighborhood's only "pocket park" as there are no green spaces within the area. It was designed and developed two years ago under the direction of concerned neighbors. The mini-park was once a vacant lot nestled between homes and now serves as a play space and outdoor events site. Pocket Parks are a recent innovation by the Portland Parks and Recreation Department to make neighborhoods less of an urban jungle.



This apartment building is owned and developed by Jane Olberding of the Neil Kelley Designers family. Her project is a mixed-use commercial/residential complex with 38 units. All the people that live there are from the King neighborhood. It is a middle-income housing unit where a one-bedroom apartment costs \$380 per month. Renting at this location is a great opportunity for people who can't find housing because of gentrification.



Adidas is one of King neighborhood's most recent arrival. The retail facility is 6,000 square feet with an outdoor plaza commemorating Lieutenant Harry Jackson who served the Portland Public Police Bureau for over ten years. He was known for his enthusiasm and tireless efforts to reduce crime throughout Northeast Portland. A North Precinct police captain estimated that prostitution in the area was reduced by 80 percent since Jackson began walking the beat in the neighborhood in 1987.

City Hopes MLK Work Will Bring New Development

By LEE PERLMAN

In its second phase, the Martin Luther King Boulevard Redesign Project represents two gambles, one on the redesign and one on its location.

The project last year reconfigured the street between Northeast Fremont and Shaver streets. The eight-foot center median, and its six mature oak trees, was removed and replaced by a four-foot median with 27 smaller trees; the four travel lanes were reduced from a 12 foot width to 10; seven-foot wide parking lanes (eight feet is standard) were added in some places. According to project coordinator Andre Baugh, the Portland Office of Transportation will soon install new signage and street trees.

A citizen committee proposed the reconfiguration in 1996 as a way to provide all the elements they considered necessary for new development on the boulevard: traffic capacity, on-street parking, and a refuge for pedestrians trying to cross. City and state traffic engineers had reservations about whether the skinny traffic and parking lanes would work, but agreed to try it.

There was considerable debate as to where to put the second phase. (The first phase was installed between Thompson and Brazee streets.) There was general consensus that the Fremont-Shaver area had the greatest need assistance, but some questioned whether it was in a position to take advantage of a public investment. Much of the six-block stretch is vacant. It has not seen a major new retail development such as the Smart Building (home to Doris Cafe, Albina Coffee House and Vessels) to the south, or Walnut Park or the Farmer's Insurance complex to the north. Likewise new housing projects, such as Albina Corner, the Knott Street Town Homes, McCoy Village and the soon-to-be Alberta Simmons building, have skirted this area.

However, there have also been some positive developments. Jerry and Leah Van Horton have refurbished the 3939 building and made it home to their own Custom Marble business and the Horn of Africa restaurant. Other new arrivals are the Irvington Covenant Church, Miracles alcohol-free club and the Ensenada Mexican restaurant. They will soon be joined by a Coast to Coast hardware store.

Three other properties are owned or controlled by the Portland Development Commission: the former King Food Market at Northeast Fremont Street, the Willie Banks prop-

erty at Northeast Beach Street, and the former Wimer's Furniture building.

PDC will resell the land to a local business. Which one? "If we were doing this in River Place, the criteria would be, 'How much could we get for this?'" PDC's Michael McElwee says. "Here money's part of it, but it's way down the list." More important are whether the business will provide needed goods and services to the neighborhood, create local jobs, and "contribute to the vitality of the street," he says.

PDC also offers its storefront program, which provides assistance for sprucing up the street face of businesses, and "pre-development" assistance for down payments, soil analysis and other costs associated with completing real estate transactions; it was utilized in creating the adidas Harry Jackson Plaza and Knott Street Town Homes.

Is there real hope for Fremont-Shaver? "There are opportunities there, and I wouldn't have said that even a year ago," McElwee says. "McCoy Village and Jane Olberding's project have changed the character of the area. The street improvements can only help." Still, he says, more new businesses are needed to create a "critical mass" to lure customers.

Similarly, Bill Leigh of the North-Northeast Business Association is cautiously optimistic. "This area seems to be struggling - in a positive way," he says. "There are people trying to make businesses go. It wouldn't take but one or two new businesses to change the climate on the street." He too likes the new improvements, saying, "On-street parking is something we've needed for a long time."

He is less happy about the residential zoning. "We're getting closer to a solution to the funding of mixed-use projects, but we're not there yet," he says. "Everyone's pushing low-income housing on MLK, and that's not what's needed."

Stephen Foust of the King Neighborhood Association likes some of the new improvements, but wants more low greenery, and more of a barrier between sidewalks and cars. "Unless people feel comfortable walking there, it isn't going to work," he says.

Leah Van Horton and Ensenada's Carlos Medrano say it is too early to say if the improvements will help. Van Horton says the new parking is not well-placed to benefit existing businesses.

"The street is cleaner," Medrano says. "Things are picking up."