

# Miracles Social Club Fights to Stay Open

*continued from Front*  
networking opportunities and education for people who are trying to learn how to live again."

The success has been phenomenal, she said. As membership numbers rise, fees have dropped from \$55, to \$25 and finally to \$5. For Friday night dances, Miracles usually has a turnout between 200 and 300 members and for special events, like fashion shows, sometimes more than 500 people show up.

#### NEIGHBORHOOD RESPONSE

Some neighbors, like Barnell Wilson who rents garage space across the street, are pleased to be in such a close proximity to the Miracles Club.

"I've seen some of these people before, out there in the streets looking like zombies," Wilson said. "They're not lookin' like zombies anymore, they're lookin' good with good jobs and nice cars. I'm really impressed."

Other neighbors are not so happy.

Nancy Johnson, the presiding president of the King Neighborhood Association, said people call her at 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. to complain about noise, loitering and cars racing down side streets after Miracles Club events.

Another neighbor, who declined to give her name, said since she moved into the neighborhood two-and-a-half years ago Miracles Club members often gather on the sidewalk outside her bedroom window after dances.

"They'll be out there screaming and it sounds like fighting," she said. "I know mostly they are just being social, but its really, really loud. I lose a lot of sleep."

Four years ago, Marlys Mock and her husband, Tom Benton said they found a fantastic house

around the corner from Miracles. The couple said they purchased the house with plans of starting a family. But when Miracles has dances, sometimes their driveway gets blocked and if the south door of the building is open, Mock and Benton site problems with what they call "unreasonably loud music."

The couple said they once confronted children running around the neighborhood at night and urinating on the sidewalks and were told their parents were inside the club.

"I don't care if I live in Lake Oswego or north Portland, a neighborhood shouldn't be subjected to recurring stresses because of one organization," Mock said. "Something needs to be done about the parking violations, excessive noise and unsupervised children. I support what they do at the Miracles Club and would like to see some mutual respect for the neighbors. These

was doing before, it may continue without incurring fines or applying for a zoning variance.

Rocky Polzin, land-use chairman for the King Neighborhood Association, said the variance process is long and difficult. He said it involves community impact statements and neighborhood support amongst other more complicated

neighborhood association at the time, said at first the neighborhood turned a blind eye and so did the city. Tom Carter, a senior planner in the code development section of the City Office of Planning and Development Review, explained that in general, the city does not do proactive investigations into zoning issues and responds to them

dows," he said. "Miracles is in violation, so why don't they have to pay?"

#### CITY SUPPORT

Miracles has incurred fines of upwards of \$10,000 in the name of the property owner. But thanks to city commissioners Dan Saltzman and Eric Sten, and Margaret Mahoney, director of the

that things have been better since the agreement was signed in 2000, but said there's room for improvement.

"75 to 200 people come to these events and they only have six legal parking spaces," Nancy Johnson said. "Even if they are not blocking our driveways, where are all the neighbors going to park?"

#### THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Miracles Club has not yet filed a formal application for a conditional use permit or a zoning variance, but board members are already doing their best to increase community awareness about the club and gather support.

Raymond D. Crutchley, an attorney for Hartfield and Crutchley Attorneys and Legan Consultants, has volunteered his assistance with the variance process.

Brown hopes the attorney can help the club come to terms with the neighborhood, but she said it sometimes feels like going up against a brick wall.

"All these people who are doing the complaining now would have a lot more to complain about if 300 more people were out on the street adding to the criminal quotient instead of in our building," Brown said.

Her greatest fear is that if Miracles does get the variance, their landlord may turn around and sell the building out from under them. Brown sees all of the new development along MLK and worries that it may be just a matter of time before Miracles has to find another location.

"Ultimately, we may have to go," she said. "But these issues of substance abuse, at risk youth and domestic abuse - they will still be there."

*David Plechl contributed to this story.*



Bennett Williams has a Polaroid picture of himself taken by photographer Steve Slater inside the Miracles Club. Slater charges \$4 a shot and donates the proceeds to the drug and alcohol free facility.

PHOTO BY  
DAVID PLECHL/  
THE PORTLAND  
OBSERVER

*Nobody had any experience with this business stuff, so we just moved in and started on our mission.*

—Miracles Secretary Marvis Brown

are just basic fundamentals of being polite."

#### ZONING PROBLEMS

The problem Miracles faces are twofold. Neighborhood complaints aside, their building is zoned for residential rather than commercial use. Before Miracles moved in, the building was occupied by an industrial wholesale business. This business operated without violating zoning laws because of a grandfather clause, meaning as long as a business continues to do what it

legal issues and is best handled by experienced legal counsel.

When Miracles moved in, the owner of the building, Jack Gorman of Beaverton, could have applied for a variance. He didn't. Neither did Miracles.

"We were just a bunch of grass roots organizers," Miracles Secretary Marvis Brown said. "Nobody had any experience with this business stuff, so we just moved in and started on our mission."

Polzin, who was president of the

on a complaint and inquiry only basis.

"We're not out there patrolling, for example," Carter said.

When Miracles' property owner dug up a fuel tank and repaved the parking lot, Polzin discovered the work was done without a permit. He issued a formal complaint to the city. Neighbors didn't understand why Miracles was able to make changes without going through the permit process.

Polzin understands frustrations with regards to zoning. He has accumulated nearly \$7,000 in fines for remodeling his nearby residence without permits.

"There are people who have been in this neighborhood for 30 years who have to pay fines for bad steps or old paint and broken win-

city office of planning and development review, the parties have been allowed to ignore the bill pending a conditional use permit process.

"We understand what they are doing and believe in them," an assistant to Saltzman said.

Support of the neighborhood is also essential to the variance process. Miracles has signed a Good Neighbor Agreement with the neighborhood association, the Northeast Coalition of Neighbors and the city Office of Neighborhood Involvement.

The agreement states that Miracles will monitor parking and unsupervised children around the premises with a foot patrol and keep noise down during social activities. Neighbors agree

## Voter Participation Encouraged with 'Vote for Children'

Face painting and gospel singing will be part of the mix at a Vote for Children community kick-off to be held Saturday, Oct. 12 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Christ Memorial Church on 1552 N. Killingsworth.

Event organizers hope the daylong event will help raise north and northeast Portland voter registration by 5 percent.

"We have the power to step up and make a difference," said Clinton Nelson, a community organizer for the Vote for Children program. "If we want to see changes in our neighborhoods, our schools and our communities, we have to get out and vote."

The Vote for Children program works under the premise that by

teaching elementary schoolchildren about the democratic process, more adults will be inclined to vote. Through participation in essay contests, mock elections and neighborhood canvassing efforts, kids learn the value of their vote and pass that knowledge onto their parents.

Last year, New Jersey-based Vote for Children noticed voter participa-

tion had dropped significantly within Portland's minority population. So community volunteers targeted 14 north and northeast Portland elementary schools and ended up signing on 24. All of these schools received a stipend of \$500 to pay for sample ballots, mock voter boxes and any additional costs incurred during the program.

In January, all 24 schools that succeed at increasing voter participation will receive an award of \$5,000 to be used for field trips, outdoor learning adventures and other educational activities of the school's choice.

"These children are our future and somebody dropped the ball [in Portland]," Nelson said. "We can't

afford to let that happen again. Votes do matter. We have the power to step up."

For more information on the Vote for Children community kick-off, contact Clinton Nelson at 503.236.4949 ext. 29, email [cnelson@voteforchildren.org](mailto:cnelson@voteforchildren.org) or visit the website at [www.voteforchildren.org](http://www.voteforchildren.org).

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