

Fourth and Gill
Neighborhood Center
Informational Packet

Neighborhood Center Background

October 2021

Information provided by:
the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood Organization Board

and compiled by:
the East Tennessee Community Design Center

The Neighborhood Center
(The Birdhouse)
800 N Fourth Avenue

- The history of the Neighborhood Center in Fourth and Gill dates back to the early 1960's when it was donated to the neighborhood. Four neighborhood churches wanted to sponsor outreach programs in neighborhood. Gene Monday donated the house to the neighborhood. The house was put in trust in the name of John Moore
- For decades the Neighborhood Center has been held in trust by John Moore and has served as a vital site, sheltering outreach offices, years of potlucks, day care, and, most recently, a variety of artistic and social advocacy works.
- Halloween parties and Family Suppers were begun in the Neighborhood Center in the early 1970's. a custom that began in the Neighborhood Center in 1971, . ." Fall 2010 Newsletter. By 1975 the small Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization was operating out of the Neighborhood Center.
- During the planning stages for Interstate 40 expansion, the Historic Fourth and Gill Organization defended several houses in the area of the Neighborhood Center against decertification which would have allowed the state to destroy houses on Fourth Avenue, including the Neighborhood Center.
- In late spring 2010 acquisition paperwork was completed and now the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization owns the house.
- At the January 2011 board retreat members discussed at length the findings of the ad hoc Neighborhood Center Committee's research on the Neighborhood Center's future.
- In conclusion, The Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization Board, voted, reluctantly, but unanimously, to sell the Neighborhood Center.

The Neighborhood Center and the Neighborhood Organization, 1972-2021

Bob Whetsel, September 2021

Introduction

I write this because I feel it is important for individuals that will be involved in making the upcoming decisions about 800 N Fourth Avenue have a better understanding of the history of the Neighborhood Organization and the Neighborhood Center. ***A Short History of the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood 1970-2020*** is a valuable resource in understanding this history and I would encourage everyone to read it, but as always there is more to the story. As for credentials I moved into the neighborhood in the spring of 1980 when the building was a fully functioning community center. I became President of the Organization in 1985, when the old board structure that had sustained those efforts fell apart, and I have been active in the Neighborhood since that time. What you will see below comes from documentation and lived experience. It is not the whole story, but it is an important part of the story of how we have come to this juncture in 2021.

The Early Days

800 N Fourth Ave. served as a true Neighborhood Center for Fourth & Gill residents from 1972 - 1984. It has not served that function for many years. As Virginia Douglass says in her article found in ***A Short History*** "*The Neighborhood Center had been very active during the War on Poverty times with many programs centered in the building. As time passed money was not available.*" If one takes the time to review the publication one can see the truth of that statement: The Gazette was published from 1974-1982, Youth programs which began in the 1970's were no longer offered after the summer of 1984, Street Fairs ran from 1976-1982. In the bigger picture, Federal program funds began to dry up as the Reagan administration took charge in Washington. At the local level, beginning in the 1970's the Center was designated as a City of Knoxville Summer Recreation Center. This allowed for some paid staff, a summer food program for children, City insurance coverage and funds to pay for utilities. When the building had a fire in the early 80's, Federal money administered through the City CDBG program repaired the damage and modernized the facility. However, by the end of the 80's all federal and local money for the Center was gone. During this same time, the early organizers and longtime board members were moving on with their lives, pursuing other interest and income sources. After many important successes, the year 1984 clearly marks the passing of the first iteration of the Neighborhood Organization, still incorporated as the North Knoxville Fellowship for Community Service.

The Transition

The Neighborhood Organization popped back to life in 1986 when the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Dr. Richard Strange and I, with the encouragement and support of Anne Bennett, MPC planner for preservation, prepared a nomination for this designation. It was accepted by the Tennessee Historic Commission and then by the National Park Service. Before beginning the State and National submittal process the nomination was submitted to the Fourth and Gill Board of Directors to request approval for submittal. By this time the Board only had 3 or 4 members who actively participated and unanimous consent was given to submit the document and request designation. After the National Historic District designation was approved and announced with the attendant press coverage in 1986 some of the early leadership became concerned about the direction of the Neighborhood and requested seats on the Board. It should be noted that the Board at that time was self-selected by the then seated board members. With the addition of some of the old guard, along with the new resident homeowners the Board and Organization began to emerge into its next act. As 1986 closed the neighborhood was a National Historic District and the incorporation name had been changed to the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood Organization.

At the Center an important tenant moved into one of the upstairs offices, David Massey. David was President of the Neighborhood Organization from 1987 through 1989, led the Alliance for Incinerator Review Air (AIR) and established the Neighborhood Freeway Committee. He rented upstairs space from the Organization for his personal office and managed the building for the Organization. In the early 90's a cooperative childcare group moved into the downstairs space while neighborhood meetings, board and otherwise, occurred in the upstairs rooms. There were few if any other community activities in the space. Neighborhood events started to happen at the Neighborhood Park, at Central United Methodist Church and in the homes and yards of residents. Sometime later in the 90's, David moved on, the childcare cooperative closed, and another childcare center known as Top Gunn was established. They moved into the downstairs space while the rooms upstairs were rented out to various organizations on an irregular basis. By this time the building was no longer a community center but a poorly managed rental property that was the responsibility of the Board of Directors of the Neighborhood Organization. Once again, as then Board member Virginia Douglas remembers *"When I took over management of the building (for the board) there was only one tenant, Ms. Gunn's Day Care"* Sometime thereafter Ms. Gunn's Day Care vacated the Center and the Birdhouse arrived. Under very favorable terms, the Birdhouse leased the entire building from the Organization from 2010 to 2020. They succeeded in stabilizing the building and providing much programming for an audience much larger than the Neighborhood itself. Some details of that phase in the Centers life are documented in the **Short History** booklet. Unfortunately, with the arrival of the pandemic in 2020 the Birdhouse folded.

Throughout these many years and many tenants, the building rents have mostly covered the cost of operating the building but have made no real financial contribution to the Organization. Funds for the operating of the Organization have come through the Tour of Homes which began in 1990 as an outgrowth of the Freeway Committee. Because funding and neighborhood activity are such an important part of the current discussion some attention needs to be given to these subjects.

Freeways and Home Tours

As the 1980's ended, the Organization became active in response to planning work being done by the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) for the expansion of I-40. National Register status had insured that the Neighborhood would be a part of the design process because Federal money was being spent on a transportation project within a National Historic District. Under David Maseys leadership the Neighborhood Freeway Committee(NFC) was created and became quite effective. Early on, the NFC developed a multipoint strategy which included raising the profile of the Historic District within the larger Knoxville community and creating a legal defense fund to ensure good access to our legal rights within the design process . With those goals in mind the first Historic Fourth & Gill Tour of Homes was planned and executed in the fall of 1990 under the leadership of Melynda Whetsel. No one knew what to expect. As the weekend wore on, we knew we had a success. We had around 1,000 visitors and raised more money than we could believe. After a couple of more years of successful tours we had accomplished our original goals of raising the visibility of the Historic Fourth & Gill Neighborhood and creating a defense fund for the Organization to engage TDOT in their Environmental Review and Design process.

As a reminder of how well the Freeway Committee succeeded in dealing with the Smart Fix -40 project, here are a few key points. No properties in the neighborhood were demolished or compromised even though TDOT tried to have Fourth Ave. delisted from the National Register for expansion purposes and some early plans showed takings on Eleanor Street. Sound walls were constructed as a mitigating factor to having a National Highway routed through a National Historic District. On the south end of the neighborhood the Interstate was pulled much further away from the Historic District. A full-service interchange at what we now call Hall of Fame Drive replaced the old Fifth Ave. interchange that only let you get on or off going east. Finally, after all legal and consulting fees were paid, approximately \$20,000 raised during this period for the Defense Fund remained and was earmarked by the Fourth & Gill Board as a protected fund and has never been touched for operating needs. Its current value is approximately \$25,000 which makes up the bulk of the Neighborhood's financial resources and one of its greatest bulwarks against potential future threats to the Neighborhood and Historic District.

The Current Fork in the Road

Since the Smart Fix project was completed, the Neighborhood has thrived with its eastern border secure and its biggest potential challenge in the rearview mirror. The Organization has continued to sponsor Home Tours as fundraisers, friend raisers and as a community building exercise. Activities such as porch hops, potlucks, Christmas Open Houses, Halloween parties, ice cream socials, long table dinners and all other social events ride off the proceeds from the Home Tours. Funds to enhance beautification on Public ROW's and money to match other grants have come from this profit center as well. The Neighborhood Center itself has been irrelevant to these activities and has often been a distraction of time and talent. Because of the Covid 19 pandemic, the Home Tour did not occur in 2020 nor will it occur in 2021 and no one currently knows about 2022. This reality has restricted the Organizations operating capital and brought that concern into a sharp focus. Interestingly, the pandemic also led to the fall of the Birdhouse as a stable tenant which threw management of the facility solidly back on the Organization board. Both these pandemic related interruptions have led to the current discussion on what should be the role of the building in the coming years. How should it be used, is it viable to be used as a Community Center or should it be sold to provide a secure source of operating funds for the residents of the Neighborhood and Historic District for many years to come?

Fourth & Gill Neighborhood 50th Anniversary



1970  2020



Neighbors Working Together
to Build and Preserve
Community

A Short History of the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood

In 2010, our *Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization* decided to celebrate our 40th anniversary. The Board created a 40th Anniversary Committee, and each member of the committee wrote about one aspect of our history. The articles appeared in each Fourth and Gill Newsletter for about a year. Upon completion, the articles were compiled into a booklet for all to read and keep.

Recently the Neighborhood Center Committee of the Fourth and Gill Board decided to reprint the booklet. Our neighborhood has grown and changed since 2010. Many of our neighbors were not living in Fourth and Gill when “A Short History of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood 1970-2010” was written and distributed. We have reprinted it here for all to enjoy.

Note: The original printer made mistakes with some of the inserts in the 2010 newsletters. Use your creativity and perseverance to figure out the puzzle.

How did our *Neighborhood Organization* come to own the Birdhouse/Neighborhood Center at 800 N. Fourth Avenue?

Before our organization was called the *Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization*, it was known as The North Knoxville Fellowship for Community Services (NKFCS) and was supported by four local churches that considered this neighborhood as one of their mission projects. A group of concerned mothers calling themselves the Mother’s Club gave rise to the NKFCS. As you can imagine, the Mother’s Club was concerned about their children and adolescents needing a place to safely gather and receive services like tutoring and summer activities that included lunch. This was in the late 1960s when this neighborhood was predominantly a poor community. Gene Monday, a wealthy landlord, was a member of one of these churches, St. James Episcopal, and agreed to donate his property at 800 N. Fourth (in disrepair) for the purpose of providing a safe and nurturing space for the neighborhood’s disadvantaged youth.

In the early 1970s, the neighborhood center was called the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Center. Since the activities at the Center played such a central role in the life of the community, the entire neighborhood became known as the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood. It was a rare instance where a neighborhood was named after its Neighborhood Center, instead of the other way around.

GENE MONDAY REALTY CO.

316 LOCUST STREET

KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE 37902

Oct. 30, 1972

Fourth Ave Community Center
4th Ave at Gill St.

Because you good people have done such a good work with the children & people in your neighborhood we have got Earl Marsh of the Tenn Title Co making you a deed to this property from my wife & I. It will be free & clear of all mortgages. This property will remain with the 4th Ave Community Center as long as you good people are able to serve the people and do a good charitable work. I hope it this will always continue but in the event it should be discontinued to do a good charitable work the deed would go unincumbered to the St James Episcopal Church.

The property we own at the Gill St park will be deeded to your organization, then deeded to the City of Knoxville for community good and go back if discontinued to St James Episcopal Church as above.

My wife & I wish you God's speed in the good work you have done and will do in the future.

Florence & Gene Monday

A NEW SERIES:

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

(Now 40 Years Old!)

Probably no neighborhood in Knoxville has been through as many and as radical changes as Fourth and Gill. An area of blighted, deteriorated housing and neglected low-income residents in the '60s and '70s, our neighborhood was given up for dead by government officials. But thanks to decades of hard work, dedication, and struggle on the part of Fourth and Gill residents, our neighborhood has emerged as a stable inner city community, and one of the most desirable places to live in the entire city. At the heart of Fourth and Gill's amazing transformation has been the work of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization, which celebrates its fortieth birthday this year.

In the next four issues of the Newsletter, we will tell the story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization. It's the story of neighbors working together to build and defend their community. We hope that telling that story will reveal important continuities that underlie all the changes we've been through in the last forty years. So stay tuned!

In the next issue we'll focus on the transformation of housing in our neighborhood—a transformation far richer and more complex than many folks realize.

—by Dave Linge

1973: The Neighborhood's First Successful Organizing Drive

Before the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood even had a name, the neighborhood center existed in the old house at the corner of Fourth and Gill. From 1969 to 1973, virtually all the activities being run out of the center were programs for youth—recreation, arts, special trips, etc. The neighborhood at that time was predominately low income and the few adult leaders were all low income renters.

Concern for the youth was what led to the first organizing drive in the neighborhood. The city of Knoxville had made repeated promises to renovate the Fourth and Gill Park, but kept dragging their feet. Calls to the city recreation department resulted in more excuses and more delays. After months of frustration the fledgling neighborhood organization decided to take action. They decided to go above the head of the recreation department, straight to the mayor. The mayor made access convenient because on Saturdays he had an office open house to meet with local citizens. The neighborhood strategy was hatched.

It was decided that a "march to see the mayor" would be held on a Saturday



March 24, 1973: Channel 10 TV films our victory party, complete with signs we would have carried on the march.

in, appropriately enough, March. Residents would walk from the neighborhood to city hall, then located in the old Asylum Building. It soon became clear that the neighbors most interested in participating were the youth, with a sprinkling of adults. The neighborhood leaders decided to hold a practice march around the neighborhood on the Saturday before the planned "real" march, complete with signs and teenage marshals who

kept order among their younger brothers and sisters. Flyers were distributed door to door and the practice march was a great success and great fun.

Meanwhile, the city had gotten a copy of the flyer and were tipped off to the march plans. A few days before the appointed Saturday, the neighborhood organization received a call from the city recreation department informing us that they had miraculously discovered \$10,000 that could be used to renovate the park. The neighborhood had been successful in its first organizing drive, the first of many successes that would come over the next years. The neighborhood slogan at the time was "Poor and Working People Can Have Power By Working Together." The march to see the mayor was proof!

—by Bill Murrah



A NEW SERIES:

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

(Now 40 Years Old!)

1974: The "Fourth and Gill Gazette"

The newsletter you're holding in your hands is a brand-new issue, having been created with the latest of technologies and filled with the freshest of news. But, if it were a person, our newsletter would have been eligible to go to its 17th high school reunion this year.

The 35-year-old newsletter of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood was at first conceived on a yellow legal pad, midwived by a manual typewriter, and delivered into this world through the slots of a clanking, stinking mimeograph machine in the expletive-filled air of a mid-1970s moldy porch.

December 1974's first issue was named the *Fourth and Gill Gazette*, and it was circulated to all of the houses we have today plus quite a few more that have been lost since then. In those early days, most of the larger houses were divided into apartment units filled with families who struggled with economic hardship on a scale unknown to most of us. A number of those family members had come together in 1969 to create recreational opportunities for their children, and those bonds led to the founding of a neighborhood organization that ranks today for longevity, adaptability and determination in the top tier of such groups in this country.

Because Fourth and Gill's leaders were parents—folks who worked in mills, factories and restaurants, and drew small government checks when those jobs disappeared—the focus for the neighborhood newsletter was on how to make a better life for their children and how to stand up to the powers-that-be (landlords, bosses, politicians).

In the spring of 1977, the newsletter became a real newspaper, printed on newsprint by our Lamar St. neighbors, Knoxville Printers and Publishers. It had become so popular in surrounding neighborhoods that its hand-distributed circulation was 5,000 copies. Its name was updated to "*The Gazette - A Voice of Poor & Working Class People*" to reflect its broader reach. But right beneath the title was "Put Out By The 4th & Gill Neighborhood."

The Gazette's editorial focus still featured Fourth and Gill activities, but its pages also included issues relevant to the whole inner city. It pulled no punches in its advo-

cacy for equality and social justice. It printed stories supporting union organizing drives, criticizing jail, housing and inner-city school conditions. It also celebrated cross-neighborhood efforts, community gardens, and government programs that worked, like community development block grants. Not surprisingly, politicians lined up to take out advertising in its pages every time an election approached.

A part-time editor was paid to coordinate content and do the graphic design, overseen by an elected Board of Directors accountable to Fourth and Gill's state-chartered organization, the North Knoxville Fellowship for Community Service.

The *Gazette's* circulation eventually reached an average of 10,000 copies (25,000 for a special issue examining the potential impacts of the 1982 World's Fair). It was distributed bimonthly by a team of volunteers to

restaurants and convenience stores. It was hand-delivered to many inner-city neighborhoods and mailed to subscribers throughout Knoxville, several Tennessee cities and a number of states. The final issue in the newsprint format was published in early 1982, after which time the economy made it impossible to keep a staff member.

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How does the thread of Fourth and Gill newsletters continue? Well, the next few years saw us using periodic flyers to communicate news of internal events. Then in early 1986, *The Fourth and Gill Neighbor* began to be printed monthly on one folded legal-size sheet and designed on a, gasp, computer. We packed a lot of news inside that small newsletter, including initiating the popular "Neighbor News" personals column.

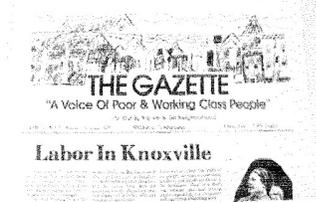
In the mid-'90s, the name evolved to simply *News*, with the sub-title *Historic Fourth & Gill Newsletter*, using the same mix of stories in the same format you are reading today.

So, our newsletter/newspaper has changed over time. But the purpose since 1974 has always been the same: to keep neighbors informed about, and involved in, events and issues that can help us work together to create a stronger neighborhood and better lives for our families.

—by Jamie Harris



From 1974-77, the Gazette was mimeographed (above). From then until 1982, it was a tabloid-size, professionally-printed newspaper distributed inner-city wide (below).



The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

(Now 40 Years Old!)

A CONTINUING SERIES: PART TWO

1975: Beginning Key Work to Save the Neighborhood: Housing Stabilization

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

— MARGARET MEAD

In *The World Made Straight*, a novel by Appalachian writer Ron Rash, one of his characters says that the past is never really past. He says that "time didn't so much pass as layer over things, as if under the world's surface the past was still occurring." While it may be invisible to the naked eye, epic struggles have occurred in our neighborhood, pitting a tiny group of determined people against overwhelming odds. The movie *300* caught our fancy because it was just such a story. The biblical tale about David and Goliath has the same appeal. If we peel back the layers of time in our neighborhood, we will find numerous such stories. One of them is about the fight to save the very neighborhood itself.

Forces arrayed against neighborhood's survival

It may be hard to imagine in the year 2010, but 35-40 years ago the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood was a slum. It was made so by public policy and economic forces at the time. In the 60's,

... by the early 70's, our area of Knoxville had the highest rate of juvenile delinquency, by far the least park and open space, the highest school dropout rate and some of the worst housing in the city. In was in this context that the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization was born.

to purchase homes or for homeowners to make repairs. One prominent banker spoke openly of this illegal practice at a public meeting in 1977 and added, "There is a natural conspiracy of the power structure against what you (neighborhood groups) are trying to do and we, the banking interests, are a part of that conspiracy." Only slumlords could get financing,

construction of interstates 40 and 75 destroyed over 600 homes in our part of Knoxville, plus two parks and a public swimming pool. In addition, banks used a practice called "red-lining," refusing to make loans for individuals



The "Governor's Mansion," which stood at the corner of Fourth Ave. and Gill St., was built for former Tennessee governor and senator Robert L. Taylor in the late 1800's. The house was in decline for decades, and was not able to be saved before it burned down in the 1980's.

and they did. They, in turn, bled as much out of the houses as they could in the form of rent, while making few or no repairs. Many houses were drained of all life, and people were forced out just before the bulldozers came. Fourth and Gill alone lost about 30 houses in a very few years. Lack of maintenance sometimes led to fires. In two tragic fires in our neighborhood, we lost seven young children.

The result of all the negative forces of both benign neglect and the active "conspiracy" was that by the early 70's, our area of Knoxville had the highest rate of juvenile delinquency, by far the least park and open space, the highest school dropout rate and some of the worst housing in the city.

It was in this context that the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization was born. The comparisons to the Greek 300 or to David are not overstretched. In the opposite corner were arrayed the strongest political and economic forces of our city. In our corner was a small group of committed people, all but two of whom were low income renters; three were college graduates. The core group never had more than 10 brave souls. As you ride or walk around our lovely neighborhood, the struggles of those few for the very survival of our neighborhood are not visible because time has layered over things. This is a story of the struggles for what we now enjoy.

... continued on following page

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

Housing Stabilization and Community Development Funds

... continued from previous page

By 1975 the small Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization was operating out of the neighborhood center at the corner of Fourth and Gill. Meetings of the core group were held weekly, on Monday nights. Hope for the future of the neighborhood began to rise after the passage of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 because that act made new monies available to cities and was specifically to be spent for the "development of viable urban communities, by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment and expanding economic opportunities, primarily for persons of low and moderate income."

Fourth and Gill sues the city

That initial hope became dampened when we learned that the city planned to spend the first \$1.5 million to refurbish the Bijou Theater and rehabilitate the old L & N depot building. In 1975, our neighborhood organization joined groups in the black community, led by the Urban League, and sued the city. The money was frozen and later re-allocated for housing rehabilitation. People in our neighborhoods began to develop our own "conspiracy," one for rebuilding our communities, pumping new life into older neighborhoods.



What was once a huge, beautiful house standing at the corner of E. Fourth Ave. and Deery St. was lost during the 1970's because of neglect and the lack of any mechanism in place to save it.

from the successful candidate. "The people who are supposed to be getting that money have not been getting it," he said. "You will have priority consideration when it comes to 1976 Community Development Act money." It was time to celebrate! Or was it?

1976 brings "triage" and disappointment

During 1976 our hopes for stabilizing our community were shattered one more time. We were told that the city had begun using a new system for selecting target areas for community development programs, one that eliminated the older neigh-



The "Garrett House" in the 800 block of Eleanor St. in the early 1970's. The house could not be saved, but its location became the Eleanor St. entrance to the neighborhood park in the Community Development era around 1980.

borhoods. City representatives said that their formula for selection was purely scientific and was based on computerized data. They were using a "triage" approach, a military term that selects the wounded for care based on the seriousness of their injuries. Using triage, the most seriously wounded are allowed to die, in order to make limited resources available to soldiers more likely to survive. Our neighborhood was too far gone and was to be allowed to die.

Rather than accept the "scientific" triage approach, the small group of committed citizens in Fourth and Gill organized heavily against the mayor, the Community Development office and their priority system. While we continued our organizing, gathering names on petitions, speaking at public meetings and through the media, and writing articles, the city selected 15 target areas, none in our vicinity. We were told the selection process was closed.

Forcing the mayor to meet

The Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization did not take "no" for an answer. Finally, in the summer of 1977, after almost two years of organizing, the mayor came to meet with neighborhood residents about a variety of community needs. Under pressure, and unbeknownst to his own staff, he

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announced that we would become the 16th target area. Later, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) forced the city to narrow the number to 8, then to 4 — and we were one of the 4. The direc-

tor of the Community Development Office later stated, "Triage died in 4th and Gill." The city representatives stated that the reason our neighborhood was selected was due to the strength of our neighborhood organization.

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

"Get off your high horses"

The battle wasn't over, though. We had won designation as a target area for expenditure of Community Development funds. But, how would the funds be spent? The city and their consultants began to develop their own plans without the guidance of neighborhood residents. At one memorable meeting, city representatives presented their plans in a way neighbors interpreted as arrogant. Don Loy, one of our community leaders (and a very mild-mannered man), stood up and pointedly instructed that the city representatives should "just get off your high horses" and begin working with the neighborhood. It was a tense moment, but the next day we found city employees re-landscaping our neighborhood center, as a symbol of peace. Our "Neighborhood Plan" for expenditure of community development funds was finally developed in 1978.

From the beginning, the community organization felt there were two ways we could lose the neighborhood. One way was that the houses would deteriorate and be torn down one at a time. Commercial interests would nibble at the edges and eventually the houses would disappear.

Fighting for renters as well as for homeowners

On the other hand, there was another way the community could disappear. We asked ourselves, "What if we obtain large amounts of funding for housing rehabilitation, causing the cost of housing to become out of reach of our low income residents? They would then have to leave and our community of people would be destroyed." We had seen how the first approach worked and decided our only alternative was to fight for neighborhood rehabilitation funds, advocating for programs that would benefit low income renters.

FOURTH AND GILL NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAM



PREPARED BY
CITY OF KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
1980
KNOXVILLE AREA COUNTY
METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

The city's Community Development office published a large tan booklet in late 1978 to explain in detail the plans for designating the money we had fought so hard to attain. The ultimate total expenditure was over \$2 million.

Eventually, over \$2 million in Community Development funds were spent to stabilize our neighborhood.

Our Neighborhood Plan reflects that commitment. We wrote the city that our efforts were rooted in two basic principles: "1) That our people have a right to housing that has adequate space, is in good condition and is affordable, and 2) Our community of people and our living environment must be maintained and developed."

By the summer of 1980, 30 homes had been substantially rehabilitated. Gill Street was closed, torn up and redesigned, resulting in a safer street, protected parking and landscaping. Luttrell Street sidewalks were removed and rebuilt. Eventually, over \$2 million in community development funds were spent to stabilize our neighborhood. This, in turn, helped to later attract private developers and homeowners to the community. It has been a bittersweet victory, however, because in spite of all our efforts, most low income renters were, in fact, pressured out of the neighborhood by economic forces. People who lived in the old neighborhood still gather occasionally, usually at funerals, and trade stories of what they all call, "The Neighborhood."

Though work remains, neighborhood survival no longer in question

As we peel back the layers, one year after another, we reach a time in the not-too-distant past when a small group of committed people decided to take on major economic and political forces, fighting for the very survival of this neighborhood. The neighborhood is now one of the most popular historic neighborhoods in the region. It not only survives, but thrives.

— by Bill Murrah



Some of the leaders and young people of Fourth and Gill standing in front of the Neighborhood Center in its original configuration (huge front porch!) in the mid-1970's. Virginia Foster, matriarch and chief warrior woman of the early decades, stands toward the left in a two-toned sweater with a sash. Charles Hunter, another key leader, stands in the back at right on the pillar base.

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

Transition: The Gentrification of Fourth and Gill

Most of us would probably agree that the government rehab programs that came to our neighborhood in the late 70's played a pivotal role in stopping the deterioration of our housing, and in generally turning the neighborhood around. HUD conceived of its rehabilitation efforts as a "seed program" that would improve things enough to make the neighborhood's houses and location more attractive to private investment. And sure enough, it worked! In the 1980's many houses were purchased by middle class, professional folks with the money to restore lovely but neglected homes. Who wants to stay in suburbia when such beautiful old houses are available to fix up and live in?!

But the perhaps inevitable result of rising property values (and taxes), and the reconversion of houses that had been turned into apartments back into single family homes, was that many of the poor and lower-middle income people who lived here in the 60's and 70's were evicted or had to move away to more affordable housing. And many poor neighbors felt, sadly, that they were no longer welcome in Fourth and Gill.

A delicate subject

This process in which neighborhood improvements result in wealthier people displacing poorer people, and which occurred in thousands of older neighborhoods across the country as wealthier people returned to the inner city, is called "gentrification." And it's a delicate subject for us to talk about. The term still elicits resentment from former neighbors who couldn't afford to stay here any longer, and it often makes our newer neighbors, who moved into Fourth and Gill starting in the 80's, and restored our beautiful old houses, feel defensive. I'm aware of this because I was, I suppose, a kind of pioneer gentrifier. Though I bought my house a year or so before the



Dot, Bill and Teresa Sharp, a core family in the early years, were forced to move out of Fourth and Gill because their landlord decided he could "put up an office building" on this Eleanor St. lot instead of making improvements. It took only a few hours for the house the family had lived in for many years to be reduced to rubble.

rehab programs began. I moved here from the suburbs and my efforts to restore my Edwardian house on Eleanor St. made an early if modest contribution to gentrification.

But I can also remember with affection many of my low income neighbors—Paul and Ruby Surette and their son Michael, my next-door neighbors, and Bill, Dot, and Teresa Sharp, who lived just down the block in a wonderful old house with a whole row of magical, south-facing windows on the second story. The fate of my neighbors mirrored both the good and the bad sides of the situation. The rehab program fixed up Paul and Ruby's delapidated house so that they were able to stay in Fourth and Gill. But the Sharps had to move away, victims of their landlord's neglect of the house and of the city's code enforcement, which many neighbors felt became more aggressive in condemning and tearing down houses that didn't fit the pattern of the more middle class neighborhood that was emerging.

The Sharps' house was torn down in 1982 and they were unable to find another affordable place to live in the neighborhood. It was a sad and seemingly unfair result of the government programs. Yet here I was contributing to the process by restoring a beautiful house that had once been divided up and occupied by low income roomers! The fact of the matter, for me, is that both the "new" (post-1980) neighbors and the "old" (pre-1980) neighbors have made wonderful and essential contributions to this neighborhood.

Working to find answers for all

While there was nothing unusual about our neighborhood's gentrification, the response of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization was truly unique and remarkable. Almost as soon as gentrification began, the organization formed a committee to see if a way could be found that would enable low income residents to stay in the neighborhood, even in the face of increasing property values, rents, and a diminishing number of rental units. What emerged from several years of creative activity was the Knoxville Housing Cooperative, one of the most ambitious and successful of all the things the neighborhood organization has achieved in the forty years of its existence.



The "turret house" at the corner of Caswell and Luttrell as it stood in the mid-70's. Shortly after this, the house suffered a devastating fire but was rebuilt by a group of neighbors who formed an LLC corporation to restore it to its present beauty. One example of the upside of gentrification, Fourth and Gill style.

—by Dave Linge

In the Next Issue: Emerging Solutions

— HOUSING COOPERATIVE, HISTORIC DISTRICT, AND LLC —

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

(Now 40 Years Old!)

A CONTINUING SERIES: PART THREE

Knoxville Housing Cooperative: Fourth and Gill's Response to Displacement of Low and Moderate Income Residents

—by Carol Nickle and Betty Henault

In 1979 the federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) office sponsored an anti-displacement conference at the request of the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood Organization. Other inner-city neighborhoods also participated. Our neighborhood had the idea of a Knoxville Housing Co-operative (Co-op) for low and moderate income people. We hoped to provide a way for long-time residents of our neighborhood to be able to stay after gentrification.

I. Interview with Betty Henault. Betty is a teacher with the Knox County schools system and lives at 1111 Gratz with her husband, Bill Murrah:

(CN): How did you get involved with the Housing Co-op?

(BH): I started working at the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood Center late in 1979 as a Vista and worked with several programs. When our Neighborhood decided to start a Housing Co-op, I was the Co-op Development Coordinator. A Neighborhood Committee worked with me. The City, Knoxville Legal Aid, and the Community Design Center also helped.

(CN): How did the Housing Co-op work?

(BH): Originally there were four houses for a total of nine units. Residents were selected by running ads, receiving applications, and personal interviews by the Neighborhood Committee.

I served as the first Co-op manager. As residents moved into the houses, they became members of the Co-op. They conducted interviews for additional residents. Co-op members owned shares. This provided the members security for living in the house as long as they abided by the membership agreement. They also had a voice in running the Co-op and the benefit of the Co-op doing the maintenance. Normal maintenance costs were included in the monthly charge to members. Members were the Co-op Board, which later hired a part-time Co-op manager.



The Housing Co-op currently owns seven houses.
This one is located at 930 Gratz St.

(CN): What happened when a member moved?

(BH): The members received payment of equity when they left the Co-op. However, the equity was limited to no more than \$500.00 plus small interest, which assured that the Co-op would always consist of low and moderate income members. Ours was the first limited equity Housing Co-op in Tennessee and may still be the only one in the State.

(CN): What early challenges did the Co-op face?

(BH): In 1981 the Co-op almost suffered a major set back. We planned to rent out the houses during the World's Fair in 1982 to help finance the Co-op. The houses were ready to rent, but the World's Fair was a bust for lots of people, including our Co-op. Fortunately, the City Community Development Office, which administered the CDBG grant, carried the Co-op through those hard times and helped it to survive financially.

From the beginning we knew that we had an uphill struggle. We learned that 50 units were required to hire a full-time manager and maintenance staff. We had far fewer than 50 units. We were all determined to make the Housing Co-op succeed. Fortunately, early dedicated Co-op members shared our commitment.

(CN): Why was the Co-op important to you?

(BH): By renovating dilapidated houses, the Neighborhood Organization saved houses and provided low and moderate income people an attractive and secure place to live.

It is important to maintain a mix of income in the neighborhood. The Co-op allowed its members to develop skills, become active citizens and future homeowners.

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The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

The Knoxville Housing Cooperative

... continued from previous page

II. Interview with Charlie Blair. Charlie is a consultant who now works on HUD projects:

(CN): When did you become a member of the Co-op?

(CB): We were the second or third family in the Co-op. The apartment at 516 Lovenia drew me to the Co-op, which at that time was still under the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood Organization. Later the Co-op met the threshold and elected a Board with the help of Betty Henault, Dave Linge, and Bill Murrah. The Co-op Board met once a month. I became President, and later became the Business Manager (received no pay but rent and costs were waived). We all contributed to the property tax. In 1987, we left the Co-op and purchased a house on Luttrell. The Luttrell St. house had lead paint in it. We could not rehabilitate it while my young son was living there, so we moved to Louisville.

(CN): What were the biggest challenges?

(CB): As a Co-op member, I became active in management as the Neighborhood Committee turned over responsibility to us. We did what we could to help with drug problems (closing a drug house on Gratz) and other neighborhood issues. We had to deal with evictions and keeping the Co-op financially afloat. We used the proceeds from two houses (in Old North Knoxville) donated by Gene Monday to rehabilitate two others. We got a federal grant to finish the work.

(CN): What are the benefits of a Housing Co-op?

(CB): A Co-op strengthens the overall neighborhood structure and helps other neighborhoods (such as Parkridge) by showing what can be done.

III. Interview with Kevin Pickle, who works at UPS and lives in the Co-op at 708 Eleanor with his wife, Caoilte, and their dog Jango.

(CN): How are you involved with the Co-op?

(KP): I have served as President and Treasurer.

(CN): How does the Housing Co-op operate now?

(KP): We have monthly meetings. Six of those are Board meetings. The Board is composed of a President, Treasurer, Secretary, Maintenance Coordinator, Membership Coordinator, and two

additional representatives. Someone from each house must be present at each Board meeting. The other six meetings require attendance by someone from each unit/apartment. There are seven houses with 12 units. To be a Co-op member, one must maintain a certain level of participation.

When a vacancy occurs, those interested in becoming a member of the Co-op submit an application. We check references. Applicants are interviewed by members who report their recommendations to the Board. The Board makes the decision on new members. The Co-op has a waiting list and does not need to advertise for members. When you join the Co-op, you pay a fee. When you leave, the Co-op buys your share back (if you leave the rental unit in good shape).

(CN): Who are the members in general?

(KP): The Co-op seems to be a magnet for people who gravitate toward non-profit organizations or public service. Currently three families with children are members.

(CN): What is the greatest hardship for the Co-op today?

(KP): The biggest challenge is similar to those faced by other non-profit organizations run by volunteers. Members will seem enthusiastic and motivated, but if it's a cold rainy winter or a pretty summer, people want to do other things. They may commit to do a task, but then something else, like a vacation, will take them away. It is hard to maintain a consistent level of enthusiasm within the membership.



The Co-op house at 930 Gratz has recently been renovated.

(CN): What are some of the accomplishments?

(KP): We are close to paying off some of the mortgages and are working on a firm financial basis. Last year we added the Maintenance Coordinator as a Co-op Board member. We hired a home inspector to get a comprehensive list of maintenance needs for each house so that we could prioritize the work that needed to be done. The Gratz Street house was in the worst shape and its needs were at the top of the list, so we used our proceeds to make repairs to that house. We are getting to each house as we can financially.

(CN): What are the advantages of the Co-op?

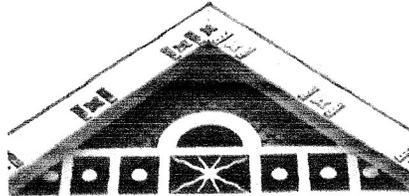
(KP): Many Co-op members become homeowners. Being a member of the Co-op provides experience with the worst parts of being a homeowner and a renter all rolled into one — you are still responsible for getting repairs done on your unit, but the decision has to be ratified by a group of 7-12 people. When you get ready to buy a home, you know all the things that can go wrong. The Co-op is a phenomenal training ground for people interested in buying a house.

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

National Register of Historic Places: Neighborhood-Saving Work Brings New Alliances

—by Bob Whetsel

The Fourth and Gill Historic District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. This action brought change, preservation, controversy and ultimately strength to the community.

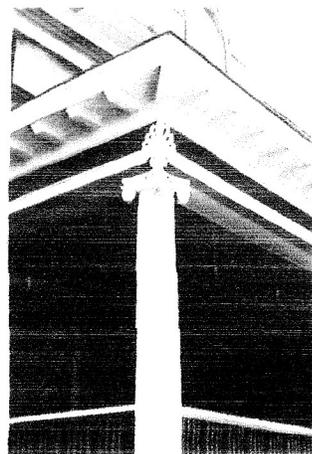


Change was happening slowly in Fourth & Gill in the early 80's. New folks were moving in, houses were being repaired and some even restored. Individuals who had been active for over a decade in neighborhood affairs were going in different directions personally and professionally. Ronald Reagan was elected president and the amount of federal dollars for inner city work was drying up. Real estate sales were stagnant while interest rates for homebuying were hovering around 12%. During this period the composition of the neighborhood board significantly changed. New homeowners concerned about their investments, enthralled by the architecture and believing downtown Knoxville had a future began to assert a stronger leadership role. The first fruit of this new leadership was the National Register listing.

Lengthy documentation and nomination process

Beginning in 1984 two neighborhood residents, Richard Strange and Bob Whetsel, began the tedious work of defining the boundaries of the historic district and documenting the architectural resources. This was done with consultation and support from Ann Bennett of the Metropolitan Planning Commission and a DOS-based personal computer Richard borrowed from the University of Tennessee. What emerged from this effort was a nomination of late 19th & early 20th century American homes that transitioned from Victorians in the south to bungalows in the north. The area identified contained a total of 292 structures, with 275 of those contributing to the significance of the district.

This research illuminated the fact that the houses in Fourth & Gill, though often in rough shape, constituted a very intact record of Knoxville's early suburban development.



After one extensive rewrite, local and state preservation staffs were comfortable with the document and were prepared to support the nomination. With these endorsements in hand, Strange and Whetsel took the document to the neighborhood board for endorsement. By a unanimous vote of the few people still active on the board, the motion was approved and the nomination was then submitted to the Tennessee Historic Commission for review in the fall of 1985. The nomination was accepted at the state level and sent to Washington for final approval. Fourth & Gill was on its way to becoming a National Register District. This news was reported in the local press, and while some neighborhood residents were ecstatic, others were shocked.

"Creative tension" and finding common ground

At the next board meeting there were a multitude of people in attendance who were concerned about this action which would appear to strengthen the momentum of gentrification. The upshot of that meeting was that a number of people who had been active in the previous decade came back to the organization as active members. Over the next several years there was often a creative tension in the air as issues were debated and decisions were made but residents, old & new, found a way to work through the divisive issues and unite on common ground. This transition and reenergizing process was the first of several benefits that the National Register listing brought to the neighborhood.

Historic District brings shelter from interstate encroachment

Moving forward, the next great benefit was the protection it gave the neighborhood in dealing with the Federal government as the process of rebuilding I-40 in downtown Knoxville began. The project that came to be known as Smartfix40 was a massive undertaking, but properties within the boundaries of the historic district were not touched. As a national historic district, federal law defined the working process for state and federal agencies rebuilding the road. This allowed the Neighborhood Freeway Committee access to the process with TDOT and the opportunity to work constructively towards a solution that would solve various transportation issues and enhance the neighborhood.

Houses saved through preservation tax credits

The availability of federal preservation tax credits was another great benefit of the recognition. The wise use of this economic tool has impacted a few neighborhood properties through the years, but arguably the most important application was for the preservation

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The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

Tour of Homes Marks 20 Years of Celebrating — and Protecting — Our Neighborhood

—by Melynda Whetsel

The tradition of our neighborhood tour of homes began in early 1990 as the neighborhood was battling TDOT in regard to freeway expansion and was struggling to find help and recognition to assist in that battle. How could we get the attention of the entire neighborhood, city government, and citizens of Knoxville to come to our defense — to help us save a historic piece of the city that had long been forgotten?

The answer was: show it off!! Let the world know what has been happening here in the inner city, right beside the freeway. And Voila!! A tour of homes! With much fear and uncertainty, six brave souls began meeting and planning the biggest party they had ever planned, and after hours of volunteer effort, and the hospitality of even braver folks who opened their homes for the event, we all waited through a sleepless night and in breathless anticipation to see if anyone would come to our party.

First home tour draws 1,000 people!

On Saturday, September 22, 1990, we proudly opened our doors to 1,000 curious visitors who came to discover their grandmother's home, sit on real front porches, rub their hands over old oak mantles, look at period furniture and light fixtures, rediscover history. One thousand people!! Amazing!! Our party was a huge success — and it has continued for 20 years. During these 20 years, there have been 13 tours, and 72 homes and churches have been opened to the public!

Visitors keep coming to experience quality, history, people

People continue to tour Historic Fourth and Gill because it is a truly unique Knoxville place that gets better with age. Most of the homes are now over 100 years old; a rarity in our throw away culture. Visitors experience high quality original craftsmanship and painstaking restorations, they delight in the way old spaces have been adapted into contemporary spaces, they connect to family history and community history and to the warmth and friendliness of the people.

In the early years, tourists often said that we were Knoxville's best kept secret, but the secret is out. The Dogwood Arts Festival describes Fourth and Gill as a "premiere historic district," we have received awards from Knox Heritage, MPC, both city and county governments, and we have achieved the recognition we originally sought as a place that is beautiful and vital to this city.



A few of the 72 houses that have appeared on the 13 Tours of Homes since 1990.

National Register of Historic Places

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of the Turret House at 1003 Luttrell St. This large formerly grand house was almost totally destroyed by fire in September of 1989 and became a vacant shell of a structure. However, as fall moved to winter a small group of neighborhood property owners formed a partnership to rebuild the house using the Secretary of the Interior's guidelines and federal tax credits. Though not without its problems, the project was an unqualified architectural and financial success. Without the benefit of the tax credits and a group of committed neighbors, that project would not have happened and that lot in the center of the community would have gone vacant with a very uncertain future.

Keeping "transformative work" moving forward

Finally, along with secure boundaries and tax credits the National Register listing gave Fourth & Gill a new visibility in the Knoxville community. It was now recognized by others as a special place with a unique history that was worthy of preservation. As time moved forward, more people in Knoxville began to become acquainted with this upstart inner city neighborhood that had become a National Historic District. It served as further notice that this century old part of town was alive, healthy and still making history. The transformative work that had begun some 15 years earlier had taken another large step when Fourth & Gill was placed on the National Register in 1986.

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

(Now 40 Years Old!)

A CONTINUING SERIES: PART FOUR

In this issue, our history focuses on two areas that may seem unrelated to each other—the social fabric of the neighborhood and the remarkably successful activities of the neighborhood organization in support of social justice.

Social fabric means street fairs, Halloween parties, neighborhood potlucks and other social events where we get to know each other and have a good time together. Social justice means organizing and struggling to defend our neighborhood and the people who live in it from threats to their well being. But rather than being unrelated to each other, these two areas are intimately connected: our social

justice work has always been rooted in the social fabric of the neighborhood—in neighbors knowing neighbors. Indeed, most of the social justice issues we've tackled over the years—jail reform, people toiling in unsafe or unfair working conditions, people living in run-down housing, the threatened destruction of homes for development projects, etc.—were ones we worked on because we knew our neighbors were suffering from them. So this issue explores the interweaving of community and justice in the life of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization. The stories that follow are merely a sampling from the dozens we could tell.

—by Dave Linge

Living, Working, Celebrating Together: Social Fabric Has Been Deep and Wide in Fourth and Gill for 40 Years

—by Betty Henault, David Massey & Jamie Harris

Fourth and Gill's popular community potluck dinners at Central United Methodist Church are part of a tradition of community-building and social events that was born in 1968 with the advent of this neighborhood's "Mother's Club."

SUPPERS: "Family Suppers" were held in the Neighborhood Center beginning in 1972. Then they moved to the No. 3

Fire Hall at the corner of Fourth Ave. and Lamar St. for a time. The firemen pulled their trucks onto the street to make way for tables and chairs brought from the Neighborhood Center, and residents showed up with fried chicken, corn bread and covered dishes. To be sure, these potlucks fostered fellowship within the neighborhood and with the firefighters, but they had another purpose—to highlight the importance of the No. 3 Fire Hall to a neighborhood that had lost children to house fires in dilapidated rental housing. We fought successfully for several years, starting in 1979, to keep the city from closing it but eventually, No. 3 was moved to a new and larger facility on E. Baxter Ave.



The first Christmas Party at the Neighborhood Center in 1971.



1970s neighborhood leader Dot Sharp (with firemen) led a successful petition drive in 1979 to prevent our No. 3 Fire Hall from being closed.

HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS: Like the potlucks, some traditions that started years ago live on in a different form. Halloween parties, a custom that began in the Neighborhood Center in 1971, transitioned to today's parties in Kay Newton's side yard on Luttrell St. A holiday lights contest—judged by the anchors at WATE-TV—was held for several years in the 1990s. It encouraged anyone and everyone to beautify the neighborhood with both colorful

1973: Fourth and Gill Folks Stand Up for North Knox Neighbors Having Food Stamp Hardship

—by Bill Murrell

An earlier article in this series told of the successful effort in 1973 to secure city funding for the neighborhood park. After that success, leaders of the fledgling Fourth and Gill Organization began to wonder if they could tackle other issues facing our part of the city. It wasn't long before the next issue presented itself.

In mid-1973, the Department of Human Services (DHS) made a decision to re-draw the zones for each of its food stamp offices. For example, people in the area near the health department on Dameron Ave. went monthly to a food stamp office on the health department site to obtain their stamps. DHS made a re-zoning decision that resulted in a change in the boundary line so that people who literally lived across the street from the Dameron Ave. office had to travel to another office. This placed a major hardship on people, especially those who had no means of transportation. Plus, it was plain ridiculous. But, it was an example of decisions that are often made for, or "to," people who are poor and have no power. Even though the issue did not affect our neighborhood directly, the organization leaders felt it should be addressed.

Here is what happened. Fourth and Gill connected with our nearby neighbors and found a few willing to join in dealing with the issue. We decided to name ourselves the "North Knoxville Food Stamp Action Group" in order to show we were representing a larger geography. Then, we set up a meeting with the regional director of DHS at his office. Several people attended from the two neighborhoods and presented the issue, along with our proposed solution. And...we won!

We also learned a major lesson, that by working together with other neighborhoods we could have more power. This was the first of many issues we would work on over the years when we would link with other neighborhoods to fight together. As you will see in other articles in this series, some of those issues were major ones that affected hundreds, even thousands of people.

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The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

Living, Working, Celebrating Together: Social Fabric Runs Deep and Wide

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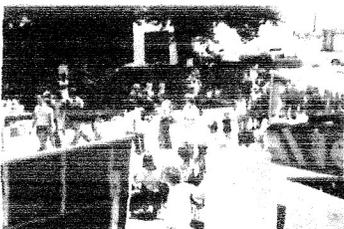
A group gathers for the Halloween party in Kay Newton's yard in 2003.

and white (Victorian) lights. Today, the tradition continues through holiday open houses in the homes of several volunteers each year.

SPORTS: Sports have played an important role in building and sustaining relationships. Starting in the 1970s and lasting into the 1980s, teenagers, young adults and older neighbors participated in neighborhood softball and basketball teams.

Sometimes teams within the neighborhood competed with each other, particularly on the basketball court at Central church. At other times, the neighborhood fielded a team in a city league. In 1977, members of the neighborhood softball team painted the Neighborhood Center to earn the \$135 entrance fee into the city rec league. As for spectator sports, nothing beat gathering a group of neighbors together and walking to the end of Gill Street, down the railroad track, and into Bill Meyer Stadium to watch the Smokies on 25-cent beer night.

STREET FAIRS & "SHINDIGS": The organization staged six street fairs from 1976-1982 that offered up live music, good food, information booths, a "Run for the Neighborhood" foot race and tons of activities for children. Lasting from late morning until dark either on the 800 block of N. Fourth or the 800 block of Luttrell, the fairs attracted hundreds of residents, mostly from North and East Knoxville. Our target audience was low-income people who could rarely



Top: Part of the street scene at the 1982 Street Fair in front of the Neighborhood Center. Right: Children's art was featured that year.

afford to pay for entertainment, so we always held the fairs right after the first of the month, to coincide with receipt of government checks. This way, everyone could afford the 10-cent ticket prices, and the organization broke even on the event.

Not everyone was enthusiastic about the fairs. It is easy to remember the

year that one disgruntled resident, tired of a long day of music and the noise of so many children on Luttrell Street, walked onto his porch, fired a gun into the air, and declared "This thing is over!" And it was.

In the later 1980s, a "Shindig in the Park" was held for several years, featuring local musicians, kids' activities, meat sizzling on the park's grills and plenty of homemade dishes.

The fairs and shindigs put a different kind of face on a neighborhood organization that was questioning authority and demanding equal treatment from local government. They attracted media attention that helped raise the organization's profile and strengthen its credibility with decision-makers.

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1977: Gazette Takes on Unsafe Conditions for Workers

—by Bill Murrach

By the mid-'70s, the Fourth and Gill Organization had developed a track record of supporting people who were facing issues in their workplaces. The organization was explicit that we supported the organizing of people where they lived into community organizations and where they worked into unions. Waitresses, mill workers, truck drivers, garbage workers and others were strongly



The Gazette always used artwork as well as words.

supported in their unionizing efforts. Most often this support came in the form of articles printed in our newspaper, *The Gazette: A Voice of Poor & Working Class People*. One of the more interesting, and successful, efforts involved a meat processing and packing plant called Huttenbauer Foods.

A number of residents of our part of North Knoxville were employed at Huttenbauer, located at the current site of the post office on Broadway. Several told us of unsafe conditions and numerous injuries on the job site. One signed a statement that said, "Several people have caught their fingers in the grinder. I was right there one day when a guy's whole finger was jerked out of the socket. His finger went through the mixer. ... I saw it myself." This was not the only example of lost fingers in the grinder. Others told of injuries from slick floors. "They could fix that floor where it wouldn't be so slick," said an employee. "A woman slipped on a puddle of blood and fell on both her elbows..." Another said, "While I was there, there were three people who fell and got hurt. One woman had to have her leg operated on six times." Others told of feet crushed by a malfunctioning fork lift and by an elevator that did not have adequate lighting or safety devices. The place was a mess, and efforts by the employees to secure safety measures had been unsuccessful. The Teamsters union had been trying to organize a union at Huttenbauer, but they, too, had been unsuccessful.

The Gazette began to do research and found that a major purchaser of their meat products was Arby's. In the two days following the first phone call to the local Arby's office, the Gazette writer received calls from the local Arby's licensee, his lawyer, a man from Arby's International quality control in Ohio, the Director of Public Relations for Arby's International, a lawyer from Royal Crown Cola in Atlanta (they owned Arby's, Inc.), Mr. Sam Huttenbauer and his lawyer. Arby's even flew their Director of Public Relations to Knoxville to meet with the Gazette writer for six hours. All were trying to dissuade *The Gazette* from printing the article, fearful that national media might pick up the story.

The paper held firm, but agreed to print sidebars with statements from Mr. Huttenbauer and Arby's International. Mr. Huttenbauer's statement included, "I welcome your interest in what is going on here. We need the help. We have absentee management, since I live in Cincinnati. There are working conditions that are questionable here and safety is not what it could be." Arby's statement included, "Arby's decision to continue purchasing from Huttenbauer's will be based upon our own assessment of their ability to produce quality products. And part of that assessment might need to be an assessment of employee working conditions."

Within weeks of the appearance of the *Gazette* article, Huttenbauer employees and the company signed a union contract that gave the workers a wage increase, additional days off and a minimum guarantee of work hours per week. And, significant safety measures were implemented.

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

Living, Working, Celebrating Together: Social Fabric Runs Deep and Wide

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OUR WORK WITH CHILDREN: The most unique effort to build the social fabric of the neighborhood has been Fourth and Gill's programs for children. This neighborhood might very well not be here today (having been slated for industrial zoning in the late '60s) had not a group of women founded the Mother's Club in 1968, women who were determined to change a neighborhood where gangs (including a women's gang) fought at times at the intersection of N. Fourth Ave. and Gill St.



Sisters Terry and Cindy Bridgman in 1975.

By 1970, several neighborhood churches, led by St. James Episcopal on Broadway, were giving support to the mothers. Virginia Foster, Dot Sharp and Nancy Wells were neighborhood leaders who hired Jamie Harris to be the first youth worker in 1971. The early 1970s marked the beginning of live music shows, holiday parties and a tutoring

program. Educational and artistic activities were emphasized, as were a variety of field trips. The City supplied a recreation worker. For a time, the young people operated their own discipline board, with elected members settling disputes and complaints. Some of the other youth program coordinators of the 1970s and 1980s still live in the neighborhood, including Betty Henault, Eldora Parr Fitzsimmons and Melynda Whetsel.

Perhaps the most significant reminders of the early years are the precious few copies remaining of "A Real Exciting Book!," a 42-page publication written and illustrated by over two dozen children, full of oral histories, poems, stories and drawings. The title came from 13-year-old Darryl Hunter, who said one day, "[In school] You can't read about the race riot of 1919 [about which he and other kids did an oral history project with Bill Murrah]. They ain't got no books like that. They ain't got no real exciting books." As Virginia Foster explained, "A lot of our children have trouble learning to read in school. Most of them don't like to read. We decided that reading might be more interesting for them if they could read stories about themselves, their friends, and the way they live. And these stories and poems would be even better and teach the kids more if they wrote them themselves." One thousand copies were printed in 1975 and were sold through churches and other social networks.



FRONT PORCHES: In the 1980s, the organization decided to create the neighborhood's first tee-shirt and held a meeting to seek opinions on just the right image to reflect the essence of life in Fourth and Gill. The result—a silhouette of two people sitting together on a front porch—captured what everyone agreed was one of the most enjoyable benefits of living in this urban neighborhood: sitting on your front porch and talking with neighbors as they walk by.

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1978: Working with Others to Prevent Destruction & Create Alternative Neighborhood Plans

—by Dave Linge

People who live in the inner city know from long experience that the task of defending their neighborhoods from encroachment by various development interests is never-ending. Often, development pressures from road builders or industrial and commercial interests are supported by local government agencies, as the following example illustrates.

Early in 1978, at the request of the newly formed Knoxville Inner-City Neighborhood Coalition, Mayor Randy Tyree directed the Metropolitan Planning Commission to produce a series of "small area studies" that would protect and strengthen inner-city neighborhoods by providing overall plans for healthy development. In the fall of 1978, the MPC staff revealed the details of its Broadway Small Area Study (BSAS)—the plan that would guide development in Fourth and Gill and the neighborhoods surrounding it.

Residents of Fourth and Gill, Old North Knoxville and the neighborhoods between Central Ave. and I-75 were horrified at the menu of neighborhood destruction that the MPC staff was proposing. Among their recommendations were (1) the widening of Woodland Ave. from two to four lanes between Broadway and Central at a cost of destroying 67 houses on the south side of the street; (2) realigning the Broadway connector/off-ramp from I-40 so that traffic could use Kenyon Ave. to cut through the Old North Knoxville neighborhood on their way to a widened Woodland Ave. and then on to I-75, thus avoiding "malfunction junction"; and (3) rezoning the neighborhoods between Central and I-75 to promote "light industrial" and more commercial usage. MPC claimed that residents there lived mostly in dilapidated houses and were not maintaining or improving them.

At a number of well-attended public meetings conducted by the MPC staff early in 1979, residents (including some from nearby Oakwood and Lincoln Park who came to support us) demanded that these and other features of the proposed BSAS be eliminated. Clearly, traffic and commercial interests had trumped concerns for strengthening and protecting neighborhoods.

Anger increased when residents learned that the MPC "study" on which the plan was based was a "windshield survey"—meaning staff members had driven through the neighborhoods without ever leaving their car to talk to residents about their concerns. Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization volunteers canvassed Happy Hollow and other neighborhoods threatened with rezoning and, contrary to MPC's survey, found that most residents were fixing up their homes and were willing to fight MPC to protect them.

When the public meetings made it clear that the MPC staff was unwilling to revise its plans—except to propose taking the north side of Woodland instead of the south side, at a cost of "only" 27 houses—plus the Cerebral Palsy Center (!)—residents decided to develop a "Citizens' Alternative BSAS." With help from volunteer city planners recruited by the East Tennessee Community Design Center, residents wrote their alternative plan, only to be disappointed when the MPC board voted at its August meeting to adopt its staff's recommendations.

But the neighborhoods had the last word. Thanks to articles in *The Gazette*, organized pressure on elected representatives, and a careful presentation by neighborhood leaders, the Knoxville City Council (at an October 1979 meeting packed with people wearing "Don't 4-Lane Woodland" buttons) voted unanimously to instruct MPC to adopt the Citizens' Alternative Broadway Small Area Study.

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

(Now 40 Years Old!)

PART FIVE — LAST IN THE SERIES

Living in the Fourth and Gill neighborhood has taught most of us two things about community. The first is that genuine communities are ones where people love their homes and neighbors and have learned to come together both to celebrate and to solve community problems. The second thing we've learned is that it's impossible, finally, to draw a line between "our" neighborhood and the communities that surround us. We have a strong sense that in important respects our neighborhood includes the folks

we meet when we visit Parkridge, or Old North Knoxville, or Mechanicsville or any of the other neighborhoods that make up inner-city Knoxville. So it's not surprising that during the first 40 years of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization some of our best experiences have been ones where we've worked in harmony with other neighborhoods to defend and strengthen our common community. What follows are remarkable examples of what inner-city residents can do when they work together.

—by Dave Linge

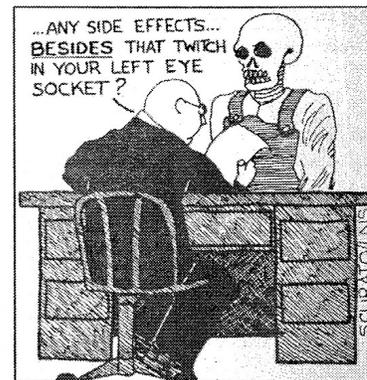
1977: The Gazette Takes On Unsafe Conditions for Workers

—by Bill Murrah

NOTE: Technical problems made this important article illegible in our last issue, so we are reprinting it here.

By the mid-'70s, the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization had developed a track record of supporting people who were facing issues in their workplaces. The organization was explicit that we supported the organizing of people where they lived into community organizations and where they worked into unions. Waitresses, mill workers, truck drivers, garbage workers and others were strongly supported in their unionizing efforts. Most often this support came in the form of articles printed in our newspaper, *The Gazette: A Voice of Poor & Working Class People*, that helped lift up issues throughout the inner city. One of the more interesting, and successful, efforts involved a meat processing and packing plant called Huttenbauer Foods.

A number of residents of our part of North Knoxville were employed at Huttenbauer, located at the current site of the post office on Broadway. Several told us of unsafe conditions and numerous injuries on the job site. One signed a statement that said, "Several people have caught their fingers in the grinder. I was right there one day when a guy's whole finger was jerked out of the socket. His finger went through the mixer... I saw it myself." This was not the only example of lost fingers in the grinder. Others told of injuries from slick floors. "They could fix that floor where it wouldn't be so slick," said an employee. "A woman slipped on a puddle of blood and fell on both her elbows..." Another said, "While I was there, there were three people who fell and got hurt. One woman had to have her leg operated on six times." Others told of feet crushed by a malfunctioning fork lift and by an elevator that did not have adequate lighting or safety devices. The place was a mess, and efforts by the employees to secure safety measures had been unsuccessful. The Teamsters union had been trying to organize a union at Huttenbauer, but they, too, had been unsuccessful.



The Gazette always used artwork as well as words.

The Gazette began to do research and found that a major purchaser of their meat products was Arby's. In the two days following the first phone call to the local Arby's office,

the Gazette writer received calls from the local Arby's licensee, his lawyer, a man from Arby's International quality control in Ohio, the Director of Public Relations for Arby's International, a lawyer from Royal Crown Cola in Atlanta (they owned Arby's, Inc.), Mr. Sam Huttenbauer and his lawyer. Arby's even flew their Director of Public Relations to Knoxville to meet with the Gazette writer for six hours. All were trying to dissuade The Gazette from printing the article, fearful that national media might pick up the story.

The paper held firm, but agreed to print sidebars with statements from Mr. Huttenbauer and Arby's International. Mr. Huttenbauer's statement included, "I welcome your interest in what is going on here. We need the help. We have absentee management, since I live in Cincinnati. There are working conditions that are questionable here and safety is not what it could be." Arby's statement included, "Arby's decision to continue purchasing from Huttenbauer's will be based upon our own assessment of their ability to produce quality products. And part of that assessment might need to be an assessment of employee working conditions."

Within weeks of the appearance of the Gazette article, Huttenbauer employees and the company signed a union contract that gave the workers a wage increase, additional days off and a minimum guarantee of work hours per week. And, significant safety measures were implemented.

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

1987-89: Inner-City Neighborhoods Stand Up to Banks When 'RedLining' Prevents Home Ownership and/or Home Repair

—by Dave Linge and Bill Murrah

After World War II, there was a mass exodus of middle- and upper-class people from the inner city. People who could afford to move drove their new cars out to their new suburban homes, leaving the older housing stock of neighborhoods like Fourth and Gill to less affluent citizens. Knoxville banks were happy to finance the suburban housing boom, but they were considerably less interested in lending money to low-income residents who wanted to buy or repair the older houses in the inner city. Instead, like banks across the country, they engaged in a practice called "redlining"—drawing red lines on their maps of the city around neighborhoods where they would not make loans. In 1977, Congress passed the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), which outlawed redlining and required banks to serve low-income communities and to keep public records that bank regulators (and concerned citizens!) could see.

In October of 1987, the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization invited other inner-city neighborhood groups to a public meeting to discuss the problem. The turnout made it clear that there was considerable anger at the banks. That meeting was the start of an epic struggle of neighborhood organizations against the redlining practices of Knoxville banks. Fifteen neighborhood groups formed the CRA Regional Steering Committee (CRARSC) and staged their first demonstration against the banks. On Oct. 22, CRARSC "redlined" First Tennessee Bank by stretching red crepe paper around the bank's downtown headquarters. Two TV stations covered the event and aired residents' condemnation of the bank's redlining practices. For the next several months, local newspapers were filled with stories about the growing conflict between CRARSC and the three largest banks in the city. The bankers were on the defensive and could only blandly deny that they were redlining. Bankers took another hit in the media when they declined our invitation to tour the inner city and learn more about the good business they could do in neighborhoods they were neglecting.

In January of 1988, we issued a set of demands, including a target of \$20 million per year in inner-city loans, sub-market interest rates, and aggressive marketing campaigns. The three biggest banks in town—

First Tennessee, First American, and Third National, all cited for their poor CRA records—flatly refused to consider such things. Their underlying strategy was clearly to meet with us and talk and talk until we lost interest and the whole issue subsided into business as usual. But that didn't happen.

Instead, in the spring of 1988, we announced our intention to use a provision of the CRA that let citizen groups request that federal regulators block bank expansion until their investment record improved. In July of 1988, Third National Bank announced its "Community House Loan Program." By early 1989, all three banks had announced special inner-city programs and had requested our assistance in implementing them. The resulting increase in mortgage and rehab loans in our neighborhoods would never have occurred if inner-city neighborhoods had acted separately, but they were won by our working together.

The CRA battles had long-range implications for banks, neighborhood organizations and city government. Their relationships would never be the same. In March of 1989, the

new Partnership for Neighborhood Improvement was announced by the three groups, leading to the founding of joint projects like the Knox Housing Partnership, still in business today. Numerous joint projects resulted, and bankers were often valuable partners rather than the opposition in neighborhood development.



CRA members Nettie Ballenger (top) and Barbara Dodson (bottom left) joined others in a 1987 demonstration against redlining by stringing a red crepe paper ribbon around the biggest building in downtown Knoxville.

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

1987-1990: Neighborhood-Led Alliance for Incinerator Review (AIR) Stops 'Cram-Down' Incinerator Project

—by David Massey

We weren't paying attention.

In late 1987, then-City Council Member Larry Cox telephoned the presidents of the Fourth and Gill and Old North Knoxville neighborhood organizations, inviting them on a trip to Tampa, Fla., to visit a solid waste incinerator like the one that was going to be built on nearby Baxter Avenue.

What incinerator?

Sure enough, Knoxville and Knox County, through a now-defunct agency called the Metropolitan Knox Solid Waste Authority (SWA), were laying the groundwork to issue \$175 million in bonds to build a garbage incinerator whose benefits supposedly included eliminating the need for landfills and converting waste to electrical energy.

Until that December, the scant news coverage of the incinerator project had escaped the notice of neighborhood groups near the Baxter site, and we weren't paying close attention to the agendas of City Council or County Commission, much less the SWA. Now we were playing catch-up, and we had to mobilize quickly.

Some 28 months of hard work ensued, with many fascinating twists and turns, including the arrest of State Rep. Ted Ray Miller for allegedly trying to extort \$75,000 from the SWA in exchange for not pursuing legislation harmful to the incinerator project. Mr. Miller later committed suicide.

Sensational news aside, how did a band of rag-tag neighborhood groups manage to kill a questionable project that nevertheless enjoyed widespread support among politicians, both daily newspapers, and other powerful interests?

First, we researched waste-to-energy garbage incinerators and documented that the economic and environmental risks far outweighed any advantages—a fact confirmed by a *Wall Street Journal* investigation. We showed up at SWA meetings, questioning every aspect of the project. We generated media coverage, creating doubt about the wisdom of burning garbage. We turned out crowds at critical meetings.

Admittedly, we had the advantage of dealing with a political establishment not used to a well-organized citizens movement. "Public outraged as waste board skips out on incinerator forum," read one newspaper headline.

But the primary reason for our success is that we reached out to other groups. Three weeks after hearing from Councilman Cox, the "Alliance for Incinerator Review (AIR)" sent a letter to the SWA seeking a six-month delay in the project. The letter was signed by the leaders of 20 organizations, including neighborhood associations, churches, businesses, and environmental groups. AIR also included the PTA at Beaumont Elementary School, located just a few blocks from the former Brookside Mills site preferred by the SWA. However, to build the incinerator at that location, SWA needed for the site to be rezoned from I-3 to I-4.

In June 1988, the Metropolitan Planning Commission voted 12-1 to deny the rezoning request. SWA appealed to City Council. Wearing "Just Say No" stickers, over 400 citizens attended the July meeting where City Council denied SWA's appeal of the MPC decision, 6-2.

"Victory for NIMBY," screamed one headline. But AIR continued to fight the project, reaching out to neighborhoods beyond the inner city and issuing a research paper detailing why the project was not economically viable at any location.

With ongoing and key Fourth and Gill involvement, AIR continued its opposition and shifted to an emphasis on the economics and the public bonds. Finally, in April 1990, with time running out, the project lost its bond insurance after then-Mayor Victor Ashe withdrew his support. The incinerator was dead.

How did a band of rag-tag neighborhood groups manage to kill a questionable project that nevertheless enjoyed widespread support among politicians, both daily newspapers, and other powerful interests?

Please reproduce and distribute this leaflet.



stop the Incinerator
at Baxter Avenue

The proposed garbage incinerator does not belong in a residential area.

CALL YOUR CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

They have the power to deny rezoning the Baxter Avenue site. Let them know this site is a poor choice for heavy industry. State your name, address and opinion. Be brief and courteous.

<small>COUNCILMEMBER</small>	<small>WORK</small>	<small>PHONE</small>	<small>AT LARGE</small>	<small>WORK</small>	<small>PHONE</small>
<small>Hyun McNeil</small>	<small>577-8802</small>	<small>577-8802</small>	<small>Jack Clark</small>	<small>657-2604</small>	<small>657-2604</small>
<small>Don Taggart</small>	<small>839-1824</small>	<small>839-1824</small>	<small>Ed Brown</small>	<small>548-3271</small>	<small>548-7581</small>
<small>Carole Clark</small>	<small>525-0235</small>	<small>525-0235</small>	<small>Ed Bailey</small>	<small>523-8111</small>	<small>653-9311</small>
<small>Maria Novotniak</small>	<small>548-7439</small>	<small>825-6168</small>	<small>Mayor Victor Ashe</small>	<small>521-3040</small>	<small>523-4572</small>
<small>Anna Davis</small>	<small>521-3068</small>	<small>827-8789</small>			
<small>Carry Jensen</small>	<small>526-7274</small>	<small>546-2530</small>			

**Attend the July 26
City Council Meeting
Starts at 7p.m., large assembly room,
City-County Building**

This is when the Baxter site will be voted up or down. Your presence will make a difference. Come show your outrage at the way this project is being crammed down our throats!

Sponsored by the Alliance for Incinerator Review, P.O. Box 5901, Knoxville, Tennessee 37917

The Story of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization

1989-2009: Twenty Years of Work to Prevent Loss of Neighborhood Homes and Community in Widening of I-40

—by Gordon Coker

In 1989, the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) announced a proposal to widen I-40 from Lovell Rd. to Asheville Highway. The centerpiece of the plan was to fix a convoluted mix of dangerous on-ramps and too-short merging lanes downtown—and to expand the through lanes downtown from four to at least six. A group of concerned citizens from Fourth and Gill and surrounding neighborhoods met to form the Neighborhood Freeway Committee.

The five preliminary designs provided by TDOT included the taking of existing houses on both sides of the freeway.

In fact one design, Plan G—appropriately called the “Godzilla Plan”—would create an outside lane through most of the existing houses on Eleanor St. The neighborhood’s position had two main criteria: 1) Keep the new freeway inside the existing right of way and 2) sound abatement. So, in response the freeway committee created Plan N—for neighborhood.

In 1990, The Fourth and Gill Tour of Homes began. The proceeds from the tour—along with donations—would be put into an account called the Neighborhood Defense Fund. The tour became wildly successful and continues to this day.

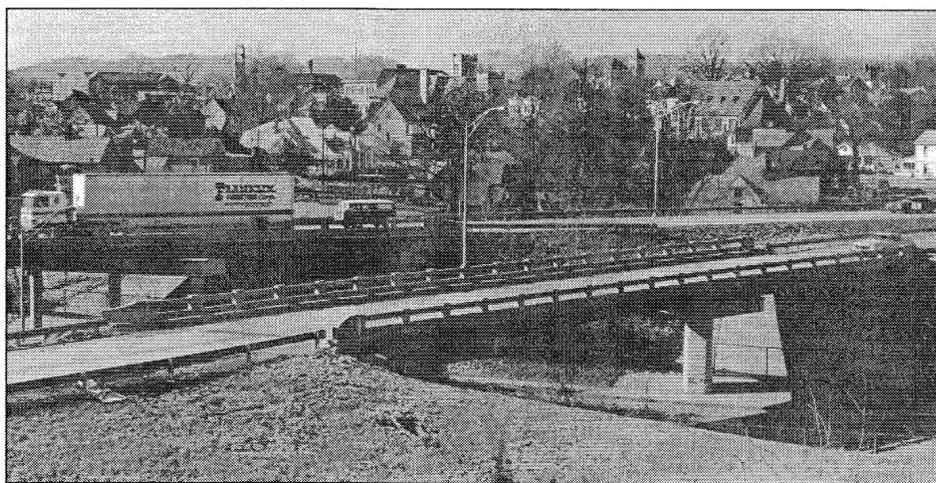
We were initially ignored by TDOT, the local press characterized us as obstructionists, and the city government offered little support. We were on our own.

The next few years consisted of saber rattling on both sides. The issue of Fourth Ave.—and what to do with it—became a growing concern. Little did we know how close we would come to losing Fourth Ave.

In 1995, at the first public hearing, five plans were presented, including one provided by the Neighborhood Freeway Committee. The centerpiece of our design depressed the main lanes so that they would have passed underneath Gill Ave. Meanwhile, the neighborhood got wind that TDOT was trying to decertify the 800 block of Fourth Ave. as a historic district. Decertification would have allowed the state to destroy houses on Fourth

Ave., including the Neighborhood Center. With help from congressman Jimmy Duncan and then-senator Fred Thompson, the National Park Service sided with the neighborhood, saying that the state could not remove Fourth Ave.’s historic status.

The next time TDOT presented designs in 1998, there were only two—Plan K (for Knoxville) and Plan N (for Neighborhood). Both plans remained in the right of way and did not destroy any houses in the Fourth and Gill Historic District—a huge victory for the neighborhood.



This photo of I-40 with Fourth and Gill in the background was taken in early 1978 from the E. Fifth Ave. viaduct (between what is now Hall of Fame Dr. to the east and Central Ave. to the west). In the foreground is the infamous left-lane exit ramp leading to the James White Parkway and part of the large “empty” space between the main eastbound and westbound lanes of the interstate that was used to expand I-40 to the interior instead of demolishing houses on N. Fourth Ave. and Eleanor St.

While the neighborhood could not convince the state to build a more progressive and less intrusive depressed interstate, we continued to fight for sound walls and adequate vegetation—and won.

The neighborhood was successful in fending off the loss of many Fourth and Gill properties and what could have been a much more massive road structure through our neighborhood. More impressive than those successes was the perseverance and creativity the neighborhood—along with surrounding communities—exhibited in engaging with TDOT and political representatives for 20 years. During that time we never lost sight of our goal—preserving our homes and keeping the charm and viability of our community.

The Birdhouse Community Center 2010-2020

Over the last ten years the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood Organization has partnered with the Birdhouse Community Center Organization to continue to provide space for a diversity of community activities. These include: potlucks, presentations, movies, music events, spoken word/Hip Hop, musician practice space, poetry, puppet shows, puppet making, Mama's Market, Kids Art Camp, yoga classes, dance classes, free library, non-profit office space, improv, wedding receptions, birthday parties, baby showers, dance parties, bonfire gatherings, Sunday Dinners, Food Not Bombs, Jamaican food, bicycle circus, art exhibits, soccer watch parties, Birdhouse café, festivals, clowns, community gardening, community radio and meeting space for everything and everybody under the sun and a few things above the sun.

On the following pages are articles from Birdhouse Coordinators, and a selection of artists and community organizers who have worked to add a rich layer of history to the building at 800 N. Fourth Avenue. This latest 10-year chapter, through no small measure of blood, sweat and laughter has seen the beloved Neighborhood Center emerge as an important artistic, social, political and cultural hub for the greater Knoxville community.

Virginia Douglas Fourth & Gill Board, former Neighborhood Center Chair

The Neighborhood Center had been very active during the War on Poverty times with many programs centered in the building. As time passed money was not available. I was a member of the Fourth and Gill Board. When I took over management of the building, there was only one tenant. Ms. Gunn's Day Care used the first floor. This business was ruined by the rebuilding of Gill Ave because people could not get to the building.

The space used by the Day Care was not up to code. The violations were minor, so my maintenance man and I fixed most of them. The Day Care was supposed to have metal doors, which we ordered. We picked up the approved doors and took them to the Center. When we got there, we found out that the Day Care business had fled during the night, taking their equipment with them. We went ahead and installed the doors since they were not returnable.

Mic Harrison has used one room for a band practice for many years and sent his rent money every month. I think it is wonderful that his musical group has continued to use the building for many years.

One day a young woman named Katie Ries stopped by and asked if we might have any space for rent. I laughed and said, "a whole building." She rented some spaces to other people. There was a group that approached the Fourth and Gill Board and asked if they could rent the building. They paid rent and stabilized the building. They called their program "The Birdhouse," and they developed many programs which were of interest to Fourth and Gill people and community people.

I remember when I was in a bar in New York with my grown granddaughter several years ago. The bartender asked me where I was from, and I told her "Knoxville, TN." She said, "I know about Knoxville. That's where the Birdhouse is. That's where young artists are able to do shows and exhibit their art for the first time."

Katie Reis, Birdhouse Volunteer Coordinator, 2010-2013

My earliest ideas about the collaborative process were informed by a PBS television show of the late 1980s: The Kidsongs TV Show. The title tells you plenty: this is a show where happy children sing songs about peanut butter, construction work, aquatic mammals, and being friends. The premise of the show was that it was “made for kids, by kids, and starring kids,” an idea made credible in the title sequence when the children skip right into the producers of A Real Television Station and ask if they can make a show. “Please don't say no,” they sing. “We'll learn how to use it. Yes, we're gonna work hard. We'll be so creative and put on our show.” “Ok, you got it!” the executive sings back, beaming, and so a crew of amped-up adolescents is given a dusty, unused studio full of functioning equipment. They dust off the soundboards, wheel out the cameras, plug in, and start broadcasting their quality content. On the set, the kids get along, exhibiting saccharine teamwork and excellent elocution. They shrug off late scripts and divide labor easily without ego or power struggles. The show ran for eight seasons and won several awards, supporting the American ideal that anything is possible with child labor and unbridled enthusiasm. (Watch a clip of the title sequence here - <http://tinyurl.com/kidsongTV>.)

The building that houses the Birdhouse is the Community Center of the Historic Fourth & Gill neighborhood. Prior to our tenancy, it was occupied by Top Gunn Daycare. For reasons unknown, the Gunn family abruptly pulled out of the day care business and vacated the building without a forwarding address. Soon after, I approached the landlady, Virginia Douglas, about renting a studio in the building. She told me plainly, “I don't want to mess with a bunch of rent from several different artists. Why don't you form a collective and sublease the studios? They'll all pay you and you pay me.” That seemed reasonable. At that point, I could almost hear the Kidsong TV Show theme song. Despite real life experience with the true hardships of collaborative labor, it was the Kidsong TV Show and its winning combination of elbow grease and pluck that came to mind. We would move in, dust off the valuable art production equipment, and start delivering Culture to the people. We would sing and cooperate. It would be easy and good. And that was it: we had a building just by asking, an artist collective by default, and utopia in the making.

A rock band that had already been renting a studio on the second story told us the building had long been nicknamed “The Birdhouse,” and so we adopted that name for the collective. We rented out five studios for \$130 a month to a local choreographer, a textile artist, a singer/songwriter, a painter/musician and her band. A friend signed on to handle booking and promotion of music shows. All that remained was for us to clean house just like the Kidsongs characters, learn our theme song, and open our doors to the eager public.

In the real backstage of the Kidsongs TV Show, and not the kid friendly backstage shown on TV, there were adults who handled labor contracts, insurance, catering, make-up, wardrobe, lighting, and so on. In our newly minted and collectively run house, we were that team. All of us had, and continued to have, full-time jobs. Chores, flakey artists, and drunken high school scenesters took the shine off of our collaborative project. They didn't deal with any of this on TV! When were we going to be singing and dancing? Added to these setbacks was the fact that

each of us had different ideas of how we might use the house and what our role in the community would be. Some of us imagined craft workshops and family-friendly events. Others saw the house developing along the lines of the Pilot Light, a steadfast local music venue. Though our different expectations made for long meetings and more complicated scheduling, our varied interests helped us become a more truly community-oriented space. Lucy Lippard writes in her book *Lure of the Local* that “[p]laces that are merely accessible to citizens, rather than controlled by them, are not truly public places.” In that sense, we are not truly public, as we reserved editorial control over the events and work that we hosted, but we were of and for our community in that anyone could propose and host an event.

It was not as organized or easy as we first imagined, but it was good. Through a growing network of neighbors, local artists, and bands, we were able to host experimental puppetry and theater, sewing workshops, swap meets, dance performances, a bike circus, as well as an endless cycle of up-and-coming bands. (Check out Brian Formo's Top Five.) Each artist and band brought a different energy and demographic to the house. We continued to host a monthly art exhibit to coincide with Knoxville's First Friday gallery walk, and Lauren Carrig keeps busy booking our music shows. We entered into a partnership with Knoxville's chapter of Food Not Bombs. Their enthusiasm and labor contributed to the ever-evolving mix of talents and personalities, and their cooking made the house smell like a home. Our mission was vague, but the earnestness endured. The small scale of this city and the abundance of extraordinary people pursuing creative work makes for an intimate community. We know and support each other.

We hoped the Birdhouse could become a self-sustaining arts space with non-profit status, an endless supply of eager volunteers, and a chipper theme song (sung by the Asheville dance duo EAR PWR). It is important to grow your own culture; important for artists and musicians to support each other; and for all of us to cultivate the spaces we wish to see.

William Isom, Volunteer Coordinator Birdhouse Community Center, 2013-2016

I had previously been in and around the Birdhouse in the mid to late 1990s as an exhibiting artist. It was a place where I could show my photography and screen weird political documentaries without much to-do. One of those exhibits was "The 12 Hour Road Trip," where Katie Walburg & Amira Inas HaQQ and myself rode all around Tennessee for half a day, shooting photographs, making sketches and doing weird stuff with mail. It was a place where people do exhibits like that and have a venue for projects that wouldn't be considered in other places in town. That type of relationship with the building continued as I secured an office space upstairs in the back, where the radio station is now.

It wasn't long after getting that office that I was informed that the 4th & Gill Neighborhood Organization was considering selling the building. At the time I was working at the Highlander Research & Education Center in New Market, as a farm intern. Being full of revolutionary and obtuse vigor, it seemed right to fight the selling of the Birdhouse and try to keep it as a community space.

We gathered the people that we could, folks from Clean Water Expected in East Tennessee in Cocke County, Hula Hoopers like Ali Blair, Birdhouse Collective members Bridget Osterling & Kat Bike, Bonnie Swinford of United Mountain Defense and people from the neighborhood, Gerry Moll & Katie Walburg. I'm probably missing some people. We walked up the 4th & Gill Neighborhood meeting and talked about the need to maintain the space as a community and arts center. Little did I know I would be the sucker to take on the effort to keep it open.

There was a good group of residents, artists, activists and people with handy skills who helped support the cause during my time there. We formed a weird, eclectic board with the late Carol Judy, films were shown every Monday at the Walk-in Theater, Cypher Saturdays, the monthly Hip Hop open mic was started by Angel Ibarra (which became the longest running programming in the space), folks such as Maya Sheppard & Rachel Winyoke bottom lined the creation of a community garden in the grown-up lot across the street. We had Fall festivals with a banjo and hayride, there was a Mama's Market for women to sell handy-crafts, Occupy Knoxville and the Hands of Appalachia! campaign worked out the space. We made a janky-free library. It was amazing, fun, but lot's of hard work.

A part of our deal with the Neighborhood Organization was that we would also undertake some maintenance and renovations of the house. Primarily through the labor of Gerry Moll, Justin Hurst and Julio Fernandez, we installed a new wooden floor throughout the downstairs, and completely renovated the kitchen, tearing out the entire floor and replacing joists. We got into the walls and repaired some of the bad work from the 1980's and worked on the bathroom quite a bit, though we were unsuccessful in getting the pee smell out of there.

I spent about 2 1/2 years being the volunteer, Volunteer Coordinator at the Birdhouse and I learned so much about the community and the hard labor it takes to make such a place function. My role was to keep the lights on, take out the trash, mop the floors, schedule the heavy metal bands, keep the doors open. That wasn't anything I did by myself and the amount of support people provided to the work during my tenure was incredible. Even that doesn't explain it all.

Bryan Alexander, Birdhouse Community Center Coordinator, 2016-2019

I started taking on a leadership role sometime in late 2015, with William Isom as my predecessor. I officially moved into the role of “Birdhouse Coordinator” around February of 2016, and I worked at the Birdhouse in this role until the summer of 2019.

There’s much that happened at the Birdhouse / Neighborhood Center during those years both in material upgrades on the house itself, as well as activities that were hosted out of the space - both for public and private gatherings. Both, of course wouldn't have been possible without an array of amazing volunteers within the surrounding community.

The space on the corner of 4th and Gill hosted weekly community movie and documentary screenings, monthly potluck dinners which normally included bringing in a speaker who held some sort of skill or expertise in their field or was working on a project to help the community out in some way to share their work and how others could get involved. Bill Murrah, Virginia Douglas, Carol Nickle, and others who have been part of the Neighborhood Center since its early days, came and spoke at one of these dinners about the history of the space - an oral rendering of the booklet you are currently holding.

There were also probably over 100 live music shows, as well as art gallery showings, plays, stand-up comedy, wedding receptions, baby showers, workshops, fundraisers, yoga classes, markets, and discussion groups. And many people utilized the Birdhouse as a space to practice and hone their craft and to share their gifts with the community.

The Birdhouse is part of the fabric of what seems to make a place unique. Most people who have been in 4th and Gill and the surrounding neighborhoods for a little while know this about the house on the corner of 4th and Gill. Whether they first think of it as “the Neighborhood Center” or “the Birdhouse” - the activities that have come out of the space have been the same. Working with the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization and the Birdhouse Board, we facilitated a wide-open opportunity for people to set up and create events they were interested in seeing, and to bring in a diverse range of events, ideas, and offerings to the wider community.

The upstairs of the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood Center/ Birdhouse Community Center has several rooms that have been rented over the years, by artists and other community minded people and organizations. The following articles are from these inhabitants of the community space.

Mic Harrison

I’m Mic Harrison from Mic Harrison and The High Score. Long time renter. Someone from our musical family has been renting the same room since the fall of 1995. Carl Snow and Michael Goldman were the first with their band Birdhouse, namesake of the building. Sometime in late 1996 Scott Carpenter took over reign of the room. Many bands rehearsed on and off for the next three years. Jacqui and The Tumble Kings, The Pelton Brothers, The Westside Daredevils, Superdrag, The Kevin Abernathy band, The High Score, Scott Miller, Geisha, The V-Roys and

(Mic Harrison continued)

The Faults. In 1999 Todd Steed from Smoking Dave and The Premo Dopes took over to rehearse with his bands Apelife and also The Suns of Phere. Somewhere around 2003 Todd passed it on to us, we've been here ever since. We love the Birdhouse, it's a big part of our band and a big part of Knoxville music history.

The Good Guy Collective

We are a group of Hip Hop artists who create content and host events with community development as our aim and focus. Our relationship with the Birdhouse started in 2013 as tenants, when we decided to unify our creative efforts into becoming The Good Guy Collective. Most of our members were already familiar with the Birdhouse and its stewards, so choosing this space to house our headquarters was a no-brainer. Since becoming tenants, we've witnessed more community events, art exhibits, potlucks, workshops, and other progressive experiences that fall directly in line with our values. We ourselves have used the community space (downstairs) to host shows that have allowed local artists and new voices a chance to connect with this community in a more naturally intimate and effective way. We see this house as a home where we've been able to grow and develop our craft. We've yet to see anything else like it in our travels across the country; the City of Knoxville would not be the same without it.

Knoxville Community Radio (WOZO-LP, The People's Radio Station, 103.9 FM)

Knoxville Community Radio (WOZO-LP, The People's Radio Station, 103.9 FM) is a grassroots, community-based, non-commercial, local low-power FM (LPFM) radio station based in the Fourth & Gill Neighborhood Center/Birdhouse Community Center in Knoxville, TN. The station was founded in 2015, created by community members, with a love for radio and a vision of radio by, for, and of the people. The founders of the station worked with Prometheus Radio Project, a project which helps local community radio stations to "build participatory radio as a tool for social justice organizing and a voice for community expression" (Prometheus, n.d.) to create Knoxville's only community radio station.

The station is a member of the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters, and it offers a wide variety of broadcasted shows – both on the air and livestreamed through the TuneIn platform. WOZO is completely financed through monthly DJ dues (\$20 a month, with hardship allowances for those DJs who cannot afford the monthly dues); periodic fundraisers; and individual donations (including from the station's DJs). WOZO does not accept corporate sponsorships and, therefore, does not air commercials. All of WOZO's DJs are volunteers, who, in addition to producing and running their own shows, provide all of the technical resources and equipment to keep the radio station running.

(WOZO continued)

Using the station's platform, the DJs are active, impactful, community contributors who engage with the community through hosting community musical events, volunteering at community events, interviewing community groups and individuals who are involved in outreach and engagement activities for the betterment of their communities, and providing free public service announcements.

Knoxville Community Radio is committed to several principles upon which the station was founded. At WOZO, these are known as "The Articles of DJdom." These include:

- Maintaining a consensus-minus-one membership, with rotating facilitation that is DJ controlled and operated. This is to allow each DJ an equal say in all decision-making, including the 'consensing in' of new DJs
- Promoting a strictly "no ism" policy – nothing overtly sexist, racist, or homophobic either on the air, in the practice of the station, or within the DJs as a community
- Adhering to the principle of full autonomy of DJs to create shows and programs as they like, with the knowledge that WOZO is dedicated to providing radio that is beneficial to the community. This includes personal responsibility and commitment by DJs of providing their shows and content on a weekly basis, with the goal of informing and entertaining the community
- Committing to meet monthly and to communicate with one another regularly through active participation in group communication platforms, and to continue furthering WOZO's mission and vision

Many of the DJ volunteers at Knoxville Community Radio are community organizers / activists, or actively involved in the work of other non-profits. WOZO has several shows dedicated solely to providing a platform for community groups, individuals working in the community, policymakers and local leaders to inform the community about the work that they do and to encourage members of the community to learn more about how they can get involved in supporting community efforts. WOZO is also heavily involved in providing shows that showcase local and regional musicians, artists, and writers. WOZO DJs volunteer to support several local organizations in their own fundraising and awareness events (such as Knoxville's Waynestock), as part of the station's commitment to building partnerships across the Knoxville area. WOZO has also created a 'sistership' with community radio stations in Nashville and Asheville.

The station's DJs are diverse across ethnicity, race, age, religion or belief, political stance, and place of origin. WOZO is committed to this diversity, with shows airing in both English, Spanish, and Italian. WOZO's commitment to diversity shows in their ability to keep the station running for five years, even considering such differing views, attitudes and lived experiences amongst its volunteers. They are held together in their belief of community radio 'for the people' and their belief in the power of community.

Fourth & Gill Neighborhood Center/Birdhouse Community Center 2019 front porch restoration

Knoxville Mayor Madeline Rogero, 4th District City Councilwoman Lauren Rider, and members of the Knoxville community officially unveiled the newly restored Fourth and Gill neighborhood center porch at a ceremony that was held on October 4th, 2019. The porch restoration project raised \$13,000 from more than 100 donors throughout Knoxville. The City of Knoxville Historic Preservation Fund covered the additional two-thirds. Ken McMahon from the City of Knoxville partnered with the Porch Restoration Committee to secure the funding outside of the grant itself. The endeavor was a collaboration with many key players. Sue Russell (Resident and Grant Writer), Bryan Alexander (Birdhouse Liaison), Brent Waugh (Resident and Fund Raising Chair) and Gordon Coker (Resident and Neighborhood Construction Liaison) helped guide the project to completion. Also attending were Jim McDaniel of Benefield Richters, architect for the project and John Wampler of High Oaks Construction which built the porch. McDaniel researched numerous sanborn maps to recreate the exact placement of the columns. The builders executed the drawings to perfection.

It was a great pleasure to have special guest Rob Monday on hand at the porch ceremony. Rob's great-grandfather purchased the house in 1935 and his grandfather donated it, along with several parcels that eventually became Fourth and Gill Park, in 1972. Neighborhood Center and Fourth and Gill pioneers Bill Murrah, Betty Henault, David Massey and Jamie Harris were also in attendance. Bryan Alexander, Councilwoman Lauren Rider, Brent Waugh, Sue Russell, Mayor Madeline Rogero and Gordon Coker cut the ribbon officially opening the new porch. It truly was a collaborative effort! A beautiful plaque was also unveiled that commemorates the project and the wonderful contributors from inside and outside of Fourth and Gill. The plaque will remain on display in the Neighborhood Center for all to enjoy. The ceremony was capped with an informal reception. Guests who helped start the resurgence of Fourth and Gill along with those who continue the preservation efforts were able to enjoy the porch officially for the first time. Judging by the results of the endeavor and neighbor and guest reactions, there will be many more great times on the beautiful new porch.

In the Spring of 2020 Fourth & Gill, Benefield Richters, and High Oaks Construction were awarded the Orchid Beautification award for the porch restoration at the Neighborhood Center. Thank you to Keep Knoxville Beautiful and to Bill Murrah for inspiring us to do it, and all of our incredible donors who made it happen!!!

FGNO NEIGHBOR CENTER EXPENSE HISTORY

	Yearly Payment	% of increase
GRAINGE INSURANCE		
21-22 term	\$ 2,313.50	5%
20-21 term	\$ 2,199.50	9%
19-20 term	\$ 2,016.50	8%
18-19 term	\$ 1,875.50	1%
17-18 term	\$ 1,853.50	-2%
16-17 term	\$ 1,884.50	12%
15-16 term	\$ 1,686.00	3%
14-15 term	\$ 1,644.00	9%
13-14 term	\$ 1,515.00	10%
12-13 term	\$ 1,373.00	3%
11-12 term	\$ 1,335.00	-1%
10-11 term	\$ 1,349.00	3%
09-10 term	\$ 1,309.00	5%
08-09 term	\$ 1,250.00	5%
07-08 term	\$ 1,195.00	#DIV/0!
Total known ins. payments	\$ 24,799.00	5%

Insurance Payments	\$ 24,799.00
Maintenance Expenses	\$14,972.49
Porch Donations	\$12,353.25
Roof Insurance Pmt.	\$ 18,941.52
Grand Total	\$ 71,066.26

Payee/Payer	Check No.	Date	Note	Expense
Bill Murrah	503	23-Nov-14	Reimbursement Furnace	\$2,000.00
Southeast Exterminating Co.	507	23-Mar-15	Termite Contract Renewal - Neighborhood Center	\$115.00
Gerry Moll	512	8-Apr-15	Neighborhood Center paint	\$40.00
Gerry Moll		16-Nov-15	Reimbursement for plumber - Neighborhood Center maintenance	\$220.00
Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization	516	18-Dec-16	Birdhouse Reimbursement (Paid back Bryan Alexander from wrong account, see	\$214.36
Southeast Exterminating Co.	515	15-Jan-17	Termite Contract Renewal - Neighborhood Center	\$115.00
Rodney Cooke	31-May	19-Jun-17	Electrical Maintenance	\$287.50
Cooke Electrical Company	518	2-Jul-17	Electrical Maintenance	\$162.50
Susan Watson	519	9-Aug-17	Stained Glass	\$228.44
The Birdhouse	520	14-Aug-17	Reimbursement for Plumbing - Hydroflow	\$250.00
Neighborhood Center	521	16-Oct-17	Fence Supplies	\$850.00
Neighborhood Center		19-Mar-18	Gutter Cleaning Reimbursement	\$175.00
Southeast Exterminating Co.	523	23-Mar-18	Termite Contract Renewal - Neighborhood Center	\$115.00
Neighborhood Center	524	16-Apr-18	Fence Supplies	\$300.00
Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization	525	17-Sep-18	Reimbursement for plumbing (paid with other account)	\$360.00
Katy Hawley	526	10-Oct-18	Smoking Pole Reimbursement	\$67.72
A & J Windows	528	14-Nov-18	Window Replacement	\$385.00
Birdhouse	529	19-Nov-18	HVAC Cover	\$130.00
Birdhouse	530	19-Nov-18	Reimbursement for plexiglass for stained glass window	\$178.70
Lee Hoisington	531	30-Nov-18	Neighborhood Center bathroom	\$1,129.09
Katy Hawley	532	16-Dec-18	Sink, Toilet, Paint	\$254.67
Lee Hoisington	533	22-Dec-18	Neighborhood Center repairs (Invoice #19108)	\$251.07
Pop Fizz	534	14-Jan-19	Light Rental for Stained Glass Event	\$38.24
Birdhouse	535	14-Jan-19	Pocket Door Supplies	\$220.13
The Benefield Richters Co.	536	14-Jan-19	Porch Drawings	\$500.00
Southeast Exterminating Co.	537	25-Feb-19	Termite Contract Renewal - Neighborhood Center	\$115.00
Neighborhood Center	538	25-Feb-19	Pocket Doors	\$154.62
Neighborhood Center (Birdhouse)	539	16-Aug-19	Window Repair Reimbursement	\$176.49
High Oaks Construction	540	17-Dec-19	Sewer Line	\$2,000.00
Southeast Exterminating Co.	541	10-Apr-20	Annual Termite Treatment	\$115.00
Southeast Exterminating Co.		11-Mar-21		\$115.00
Brandon Beavers Singh	542	1-Jun-21	Reimburse for lock changes	\$173.61
Chris Irwin	543	1-Jun-21	Reimburse for handicap rail repairs	\$188.81
Home Federal		27-May-21	Chargeback for double presentment for WOZO April Rent	\$175.00
Home Federal		27-May-21	Chargeback Fee	\$9.00
KUB	Electronic	9-Jun-21	May/June Utility Bill	\$632.35
Locke Plumbing	544	14-Jul-21	Water Leak Repairs	\$96.00
KUB	Electronic	16-Jul-21	July Utility Bill	\$327.00
KUB	Electronic	13-Aug-21	August Utility Bill	\$344.00
Bill Murrah/Betty Henault	545	16-Aug-21	Neighborhood Center Repairs from work days	\$1,491.19
KUB	Electronic	17-Aug-21	September Utility Bill	\$272.00
Total Known Maintenance Expenses				\$14,972.49

PORCH DONATIONS	INCOME	EXPENSE
Porch Donations from 2017 Porch Hop	\$110.00	
Porch Donations	\$900.00	
Porch Donations	\$655.00	
Porch Donations	\$1,295.00	
Porch Donations	\$9,000.00	
Porch Donations	\$245.00	
Porch Donations	\$100.00	
Porch Donation	\$48.25	
Gordon Coker		\$199.90
TOTAL:	\$12,353.25	\$199.90

loc/Unit Claim Number Loss Date Term Description Cause of Loss Amt Paid* Reserve Total Incurred
0001-800 N 4TH AVE C -KPNP000X1V3I6L4L2E6 T9N 4 / 2 / 2 -01101/04/2011 15:H22ail dmg to roof
no injuries
WEATHER-WIND AND
HAIL
01 \$18,941.52 \$0.00 \$18,941.52
Total This Claim: \$18,941.52 \$0.00 \$18,941.52
Grand Totals \$18,941.52 \$0.00 \$18,941.52

Birdhouse Historic Photos



Birdhouse Historic Photos

