



Gifford Park's Pride

Gifford Park Neighborhood: A Great Place to Live, Work, Learn and Play

February 1999

A Publication of the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association

Historically Speaking...

Leota Norton and the Frank Lloyd Wright House

Two subjects are tied together in this report: Miss Leota Norton and the house she lived in on Davenport street.

Leota's career spanned 43 years of professional service as a social worker with the Red Cross and family service organizations in Omaha and New York City. She retired from the Douglas-Sarpy Red Cross chapter in 1970 as director of service to military families. But she didn't stop working, she just called it by another name: volunteering. "Volunteer service to the community and others creates a good feeling within oneself of being a part of and sharing in some of the happenings in the city," Leota said in an interview appearing in the **World-Herald** in 1975. She was co-chairman of United Way's Volunteer Bureau for at least 13 years, calling it her "fun experience." She was also a volunteer instructor for the National Red Cross, conducting three-day courses on "Principles of Social Welfare for Red Cross." In this job she traveled to Wichita, Peoria, Oklahoma City, Milwaukee and Madison among others. She received no pay, only expenses. In Omaha she taught new Red Cross Volunteers how to provide professional service to military families. In addition, Leota was on the board of directors of GOCA and a member of the by-laws committee, membership chairman of the National Association of Social Workers, and chairman of the board of the Literacy Council of Nebraska.

Leota liked great music and was a regular symphony member. She enjoyed attending concerts with her friends. She also enjoyed her church—Kountze Memorial Lutheran. She died in 1986.

Leota moved into the Gifford Park area in 1964. She had previously lived at 38th and Dewey. The house at 3712 Davenport attracted her as soon as she saw the "for rent" sign. The first floor particularly appealed to her because there was a fireplace in the center of the house dividing the dining, living, and kitchen areas. When a friend from another city noticed "Lloyd Wright features," and a neighbor mentioned its history, she realized what a distinguished home it was.

The home was designed by Louis Bouchard and built in 1916.

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Next Meeting

**Thursday, February 4
7:00 P.M.**

**Guest Speaker:
Peter Smith
Omaha Public Schools**

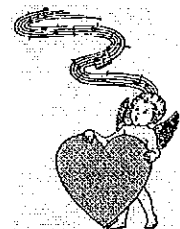
**St. Joseph's Hospital
Dining Rooms A,B, and C**

GPNA Watch Group Takes A Holiday Break



The GPNA Neighborhood Watch Group takes time out from their patrol duties during the holidays to enjoy their traditional dessert meeting at Village Inn. Pictured from left to right are Terry, Jim, and Mike Wilwerding and Harry Dirgo. If you would be interested in volunteering with the watch group, call Terry, Jim, or Mike (phone numbers are located on page 2).

**HAPPY
VALENTINE'S
DAY!**



GPNA OFFICERS**PRESIDENT**

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VICE PRESIDENT

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Mike Bacome 344-3233

PARKING VIOLATIONS

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PUBLIC RELATIONS

Anne & Linda Chapman 348-0464

TOOL LENDING

Tom Rose 932-6197

WATCH GROUP

Mike Wilwerding 341-8224

WEEDS & LITTER

Jim Wilwerding 551-1344

YATES ACADEMY LIAISON

Dana Carlton 346-4575

From the Desk of the President

I thought I would make this article a sort of "State of the Neighborhood" address. I will start out by saying that I have no interns.

By observation of the property in the neighborhood, we can see that many houses are being improved in the area. We are seeing more resident-owned property west of 33rd Street. We are getting good cooperation from the city inspectors in dealing with dilapidated property, although the time span from complaint to resolution tends to stretch out a bit. Certainly property owners are given ample notice and time to correct problems. Many of the rental properties in our area also seem to be getting some improvements, so overall, I think we can agree that the area is getting better from a property standpoint. Houses and properties seem to be selling well, and getting fairly good (and increasing) prices, so buyers seemingly share this assessment.

The Association presently has about 120 members. Our bank balance is healthy enough that we can be reasonably assured of meeting expenses for the next couple of years, anyway. We continue to issue a newsletter monthly, and continue to put on many activities for members and the community. We always talk about actively trying to recruit more members, and maybe this will be the year that we do it. We have been successful in getting a number of community leaders to address our monthly meetings, and we enjoy the support of many of the businesses in the area. The organization is strong and stable, although we can always use a few more volunteers, and many of the committee chairs would appreciate passing the jobs on to someone else, which is nothing new.

Our progress in working with law enforcement has seemed a little uneven in the past year. Certainly we have seen stepped up activity against drug sales in the area very recently, although there is a disappointingly high incidence of young men standing around on street corners late at night. The police department, after many contacts and a meeting, worked to reduce the congestion of sidewalks along 33rd Street this past summer, so that pedestrians could once again walk through the business district without be harassed by loiterers, and drivers had a reasonable chance of being able to pass through the intersection on the green light. Our experience has largely been that the police department would respond to complaints, but tended not to take action until complaints were made. Chief Carey, both in addressing our group and in the published plan, indicated that more officers on the street will equate to more time to handle routine problems, rather than responding to complaints. The plan also includes more patrolling of the 33rd and California area. We hope the plan is successful. We will be scheduling a meeting with the Northeast Precinct Captain and, if possible, Chief Carey, to try to find ways to avoid the problem this coming summer, rather than waiting for the problem to get out of hand then trying to deal with it.

From the standpoint of appearance, the neighborhood seems to have a problem with junk cars and unlicensed cars. Though we turn in a list at least monthly, the problem doesn't seem to improve, and we don't seem to see much action from the police department except in response to complaints. An outsider driving through the neighborhood might dismiss the area as declining, or perhaps substandard, when observing the cars parked in yards and the other derelict vehicles. Personally, while walking to or from work, it is not uncommon to see a dozen or so junk or unlicensed vehicles parked on the street, not to mention unlicensed and junk vehicle parked in yards. While we all know that the area is improving, appearances suggest otherwise. Hopefully we can get the police department to more aggres-

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Editor's note: If you have something that would be of interest to our neighborhood, we encourage you to submit an article for our monthly newsletter. Editorials must be approved by the GPNA Executive Board. Articles can be left at the GPNA Office; please include your name and phone number. Contact Sue Wilwerding (342-2795) or Chris Foster (342-6006) for information regarding the newsletter.

Historically Speaking...Leota Norton

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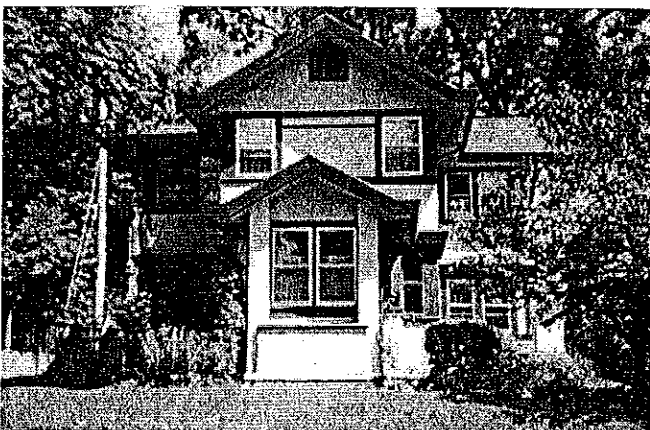
Bouchard was a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect who created the "Prairie Style" of architecture. The style draws its name from its emphasis on vertical and horizontal lines, which in many ways mimic the overall impression of the prairies—open, airy, massive, uncluttered and somewhat Spartan. Prairie Style homes were most often two stories with hipped roofs, built-in furniture and staircases, and geometric windows and woodwork.

The house on Davenport street was built for George Forster, a Chicago native who moved to Omaha and worked as a yard goods buyer for Hayden's Department Store in downtown Omaha. Perhaps he had seen the Prairie Style homes designed by Wright in the Chicago area. Forster lived in the house until he died in 1957.

The present owners are Bob Baum, a Physician Assistant, and Jeanne Johnson, who works in marketing. They bought the house in the fall of 1995. They were attracted to the house not realizing its architectural significance, but because of its original design and unique features. Moldings, windows and floors were particularly appealing. The size of the house was perfect for them and they appreciated an older house in an established neighborhood. They enjoy their "walk around" fireplace which they use regularly. The garage was added by previous owners. The design had to conform with the design of the house and required a permit from Landmarks, Inc. as well as the city.

Bob and Jeanne are becoming experienced gardeners and invite a "look see" as you walk or drive by in the summer months.

by Eva Swanson



The former residence of Leota Norton at 3712 Davenport is an example of the "Prairie Style" of architecture originated by Frank Lloyd Wright in the early 1900's. The house was designed by Louis Bouchard and built in 1916. (Photo by Eva Swanson)

From the Desk of the President. . .

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sively ticket and tow vehicles, which will encourage owners to be more responsible about vehicles and improve the appearance of the area. We have been fairly successful at getting property owners to keep lawns mowed and combat the creation of litter, so I think the junk car problem should get more priority.

Taken as a whole, I think we can agree that the neighborhood is a pretty good place to live. There is room for improvement, and the association will be working to realize some improvements. As always, all of you are welcome to bring up any areas you think we need to work on at the monthly group meetings or the Board meetings, although individuals doing so run the risk of being given the responsibility of working the problems. You have been warned.

Speaking of warnings, some of the members at the January meeting related problems they had with a young woman talking her way into their residences, distracting them, and pilfering some of their property. I believe the women's spiel was that she was selling cosmetics, and she was quite convincing, and insistent on getting in. As always, it is a good idea not to let strangers into your house or apartment. If they aren't involved in making off with your property at the time of their initial visit, there's a good chance that they are checking out your property with an eye towards returning when you are not at home. It is a shame that people can't always be trusted, but not as much of a shame as having valuable belongings disappear.

Speaking of meetings, our February meeting will feature Mr. Peter Smith from the superintendent's office of the Omaha Public Schools. As many of you may have noticed in the paper, the superintendent's plan for stopping busing and creating neighborhood schools includes closing Yates Academy, with students going to Kellom School on 24th Street north of Cuming. This seems a shame to me, since this would likely be out of walking distance for neighborhood children, and the staff at Yates was doing excellent work with the students there, by all indications. Mr. Smith will be discussing the reasons for the closing, and the basis of the decision, as well as other aspects of the plan. If you have Web access, the plan can be read and/or downloaded from www.OPS.org, or a copy of the plan can be viewed at Yates Academy. A copy of the plan can also be requested by calling 557-2070, but the plan runs to 40 or so pages, so in the interest of saving a few trees we might want to show some restraint in getting our own personal copies. Mr. Smith will also bring a few copies to the meeting. Hope to see you there.

by Jim Wilwerding

Free Tax Help Is Here Again For the Fifth Year in a Row!

Free tax help will once again be available at the GPNA office located to the south of J-N-J Grocery, 33rd & California St. **Everyone is welcome!** IRS representatives will provide free tax help for our neighborhood. Processing of basic tax returns will be available. Electronic filing may be available this year. Walk-in appointments are welcome, but priority will be given to those who call to schedule an appointment. Free tax help will be available on the following dates:

Saturdays: February 6, 13, 20, 27 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
April 3, 10 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Wednesdays: February 3, 10, 17, 24 9 a.m. to noon
March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 9 a.m. to noon
April 7, 14 9 a.m. to noon



For more information, or to schedule an appointment, call 551-3629.

What's Happening in the Neighborhood . . .

The GPNA would like to thank Officers **Brian Heath** and **Gary Kula** for addressing the January general meeting. The officers discussed changes in the Weed and Seed unit and progress in dealing with crime situations in the neighborhood.

The **Augustana Cornerstone Foundation**, a community outreach program of Augustana Lutheran Church at 38th and Lafayette, is in the process of acquiring the house at **3324 Myrtle** to renovate and sell to a low or moderate income household. Potential buyers are given help to determine whether they might qualify, now or later, for a home renovated by the Foundation. Several more homes will be acquired and renovated during 1999. If you are renting now and would like to work toward home ownership, please contact **Dave Peterson**, Board Chairman, at **553-1155**.

St. Cecilia's Boy Scout Troup 100 will hold their annual Pancake Breakfast on **Sunday, February 14th**, from **8 a.m. to 1 p.m.** in the school's cafeteria at 39th and Webster. The cost is **\$3.50** for adults and **\$2.50** for children.

A.V. Sorensen Library February Events Children's Department

Saturday Movie Matinees: 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. through February 20th
WINNIE-THE-POOH Storytime: February 27th 1:00 p.m. Special visit by A.A. Milne's WINNIE-THE-POOH, courtesy of Bor'er's, 132nd and Maple. Pre-register in person or by phone at Sorensen Library **444-5274**.
Sign-up for Spring Storytime series begins February 16th.



GIFFORD PARK NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

532 N. 33rd Street, Omaha, NE 68131

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(Please print clearly)



Membership year: _____ *(Membership year runs from June 1 through May 31)*

Type of membership: Single (\$5) _____ Family (\$8) _____ Business (\$25) _____

Name of business _____

Name _____
(Last) (First)

Spouse _____
(Last) (First)

Address _____
(Street) (City) (State) (Zip)

Telephone Number: _____
(Home) (Work)

In case of an emergency notify: _____
(Name) (Address) (Phone No.)

May this information be included in the GPNA Neighborhood Directory? Yes _____ No _____

Signature _____ Date _____

For City Services,
Information, or
Complaints

Call:
Mayor's Action Office
444-5555