



Gifford Park's Pride

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

January 2000

A Publication of the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association

Harry Dirgo Named GPNA's 1999 "Neighbor Of The Year" At Holiday Banquet

Harry Dirgo, a long-time member of the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association, was named "Neighbor of the Year" at the 11th Annual Holiday Banquet held at St. Joseph's Hospital on December 2nd. In presenting the award, Terry Wilwerding noted that Harry has been a faithful member of the Watch Group from its inception, going out both Friday and Saturday nights, in the heat of summer and cold of winter, having logged thousands of hours in service to the Association. He also noted that Harry is a great ambassador for the GPNA, a friendly person who seems to know just about everyone, and can be seen at nearly every Association function. In recognition of his service, Harry was presented with a GPNA- lettered jacket. Congratulations and thanks for everything, Harry!



The 1999 "Neighbor of the Year", Harry Dirgo, is shown on the left wearing his new GPNA jacket, given to him as a token of the Association's appreciation for his service and dedication to the GPNA. On the right is Terry Wilwerding, who presented the award to Harry. (Photo by Sue Wilwerding)

Next Meeting

Thursday, January 6
7:00 P.M.

Guest Speaker:
Dr. Thomas Kuhlman
"Architectural History of the
Gifford Park Neighborhood"

St. Joseph Hospital
Dining Rooms A, B, and C

Holiday Lighting Contest Winners Chosen December 19

On Sunday night, December 19th, a panel of judges drove through the entire Gifford Park neighborhood to chose the winners of the 1999 **Holiday Lighting Contest**. It proved to be a difficult job because the judges found that there were many excellent displays this year. A total of 5 winning addresses were chosen, with each winner receiving a \$10 gift certificate to California Tacos. The winners were:

715 North 36th
204 North 35th Ave.
3429 Webster
356 North 36th Ave.
3514 California

Addresses receiving honorable mention were 3405 California St., 327 N. 36th Ave., 321 N. 36th Ave., 315 N. 31st St., 135 N. 32nd Ave., River City Baptist Church near 34th and Dodge, 3605 California St., 621 N. 36th St., 3214 Cass St., 3405 Webster St., and 3555 California St. Thanks to everyone in the neighborhood who "participated" in the contest by putting up decorations - it really made the neighborhood look festive and hopefully it put residents and passers-by in the holiday mood!



For more on
the Holiday
Banquet
see Page 6!

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Dana Carlton 346-4575

The President's Column

Hope everyone's holiday season went well. The biggest challenge among my family, friends and co-workers seems to be staying healthy. I can't recall a time when so many people I know have struggled with colds and the flu. Let's hope 2000 starts off healthier for those who have been ill. I'd like to summarize some of 1999's happenings in our neighborhood and list items the GPNA plans to work on.

Of course the annual GPNA events were very strong again this year – Free Tax help (including electronic filing), Easter Egg Hunt, Spring Cleanup, Tennis Blitz at Gifford Park and Yates School (both in May), St. Joseph's Community Bike Rodeo, Sun Dawgs Summer Fun program, mini-cleanup of business district, Tennis in the Park (August), PKA Baseball/Softball Clinic (October), Fall Cleanup including Pumpkin Patch, PKA Haunted House, Yates-Kellom Pen Pal letter writing program, Holiday Banquet, and finally the Holiday Decorating Contest.

Guest speakers at the monthly general meetings in 1999 included: Chief Don Carey, Captain Pitmon Foxall, Lt. Don Komor, Sgt. Barry DeJong, Sgt. Dave Sedlacek, Officer Mike Paul, Officer Trevor Walsh, Officer Gary Kula, Officer Brian Heath, Deidra Andrews (CRC); OPS Representative Peter Smith, OPS Board Member Nancy Huston, Yates-Kellom Principal Jo Kubik; Augustana Cornerstone Foundation; Douglas County Lead Poisoning in Children – Kathy Leinenkugel; Mayor Hal Daub, and City Councilman Subby Anzaldo.

Some of the other events making headlines in our neighborhood were the two shootings along 33rd St. in late winter. This led to the Police Department's Metro Unit, headed by Sgt. Barry DeJong, to do a door-to-door neighborhood survey with GPNA volunteers along 33rd St. The closing of Yates Academy was a major disappointment because it didn't seem to make sense to many of us. We plan to revisit this issue soon because this was just the first year of the OPS Plan and adjustments are always possible. It was disappointing also that more parents did not organize and voice their opinion, as they are ultimately the ones who must get active for their children's safety. The "Take Back 33rd Street" project was initiated because of numerous complaints about criminal activity, especially drug dealing, on North 33rd St. The effort involved three community walks by concerned neighbors and included passing out flyers and contacting landlords. Chief Don Carey and Deputy Chief Steve Coufal responded to the area's concerns by providing more attention especially with traffic checks. There is no question that our neighborhood is a better place when there is an active and consistent police presence. The GPNA will continue to work with police to get into a maintenance mode instead of a reactive mode.

Communication of information through the newsletter and public safety in our neighborhood are the core priorities during the coming year. There are of course many other items the GPNA continues to work on and we will be more specific in future newsletters and neighborhood association meetings, which everyone is welcome to attend. Any suggestions, criticisms, or advice is welcome at any time.

by Chris Foster

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.

Harry Dirgo - At The Top

When the neighborhood watch group was first formed, in order to encourage participation, it was decided to provide awards for hours served.

Harry Dirgo and a few others were outdistancing the field. After Harry's walls were covered with plaques, we turned to the 1000 hour award, which Harry soon received.

So this writer went to Regal Awards for suggestions. While visiting with them, the conversation turned to recent news of the number of attempts to climb Mount Everest. I thought of the effort and skills required to perform such a task; I then thought about Harry. How about we put him on top and then there is nowhere else to go. Regal had a big block of lexan (or some other kind of plastic) with which they created the Everest Survivors Award.

PUT HARRY DIRGO'S NAME ON IT! DONE!!

Harry continues to show up every Friday and Saturday for Watch Group - this marathon man will not give up.

The neighborhood board in their wisdom has made Harry the 1999 Neighbor of the Year.

Harry, I don't think there is anything left - thank you, and don't give up.

by Ron Yates

Snow Removal Information

A **Snow Emergency** means that no vehicles may be parked on the streets where you see an Emergency Snow Route sign. Crews will plow these streets first and the mayor will announce when the snow emergency is over. If cars are left parked on an Emergency Snow Route during a snow emergency, the cars will be subject to a fine and may be towed at the owners' expense. Radio and TV stations will broadcast all necessary information.

Omaha's Municipal Code requires **all sidewalks to be shoveled within 24 hours after a snowstorm**. Walks left unshoveled may be cleared by City crews at the expense of the property owner. For more information, or if you have a comment or complaint, please call the **Street Maintenance Office at 444-4919** (24 hour line).

Free Tax Help Is Here Again

For the Sixth 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 5, 12, 19, 26 11 am to 1 pm

April 1, 8, 15 11 am to 1 pm

OR By Appointment

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



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Historically Speaking... The Morsman House

(Our "guest historian" this issue is Rob Parolek, who is the president of the Joslyn Castle Neighborhood Association. Rob came across this information while reading some books about Omaha's history, and offered to share this article with the GPNA.)

At the turn of the 20th century, the area that we now know as the Gifford Park neighborhood was on the northern edge of the West Farnam District, which was on the far western edge of the city and was home to Omaha's wealthies families. One of these magnificent homes, located at 224 North 32nd Ave., was built in 1890 by Omaha businessman Edgar Martin Morsman. Mr. Morsman came to Omaha around 1860. He worked for the American, United States, and Wells Fargo express stage lines before starting into business for himself. He organized the Pacific Express Company with the help of Jay Gould of New York City. In 1878 Mr. Morsman and other investors organized the Nebraska Telephone Company, one of the first phone companies in eastern Nebraska. Later the company would merge to create the Northwestern Bell Co., an earlier name for US West Communications.

The Morsman house sat on lots 1 through 10 in the Morsman Park Development. This amount of land was not unusual for the time since most households had to have room for formal yards, cow barns, pastures, and carriage houses, which were a necessity since the closest public transportation to the West Farnam District was a cable car which stopped at 29th and Dodge. The carriage house was where the family's horses were stabled and quarters for the coachman could be found. Mr. Morsman and his wife Francis Ann had five children, two of whom died before the age of nine. By 1900, the house had an elevator and was staffed with five live-in servants, who were called to duty by a button that was installed in the dining room floor under the table. Gasolier lights originally lighted the Morsman House; one original gaslight still exists in the house along with several gas jets.

If you would have called on the Morsman family and looked north out of their dining room windows, you would have seen the home of Henry Whitfield Yates at 3120 Davenport. The Yates home was a 30-room structure made of cut stone that sat on a 2 acre lot and was known as Yates Castle (which predated Joslyn Castle by about 14 years). Today Yates Public Grade School and the Hillside Court Apartments occupy the lot (Yates Castle was torn down in 1944). Further south on 32nd Avenue lived the family of Henry Doorly at 137 N. 32nd Ave. Henry Doorly was the owner and publisher of the World Herald newspaper, and his name graces one of Omaha's most popular attractions: the Henry Doorly Zoo.

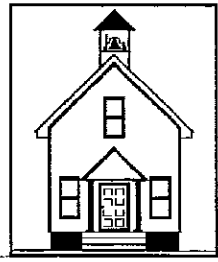
Today the Morsman home is the Nebraska Delta Chapter House of Creighton's Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity. During a recent renovation, the original wallpaper on the ceiling was exposed in the dining room and back parlor (fireplace room). Unfortunately, the ceilings are once again covered over with new dry wall to be rediscovered again some day.

United States Mission's Goal: Helping Homeless and Needy

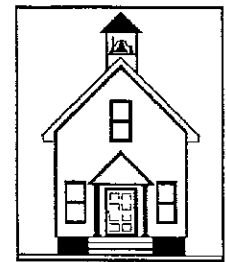
Although not technically within the boundaries of the GPNA, the United States Mission, located at 3216 Cuming St., seeks to help anyone in the neighborhood who may benefit from its program. The United States Mission is an interdenominational religious, nonprofit organization which has been in operation for over 35 years helping the homeless and needy. It does not receive funding from any governmental agency or social service program, but is solely supported by private donations. According to **Waco Carpenter** and **Peggy Flores**, who came from California to direct the Omaha location, the US Mission provides transitional housing for individuals who are homeless or needy but are willing to work to make a better life for themselves. The house has a 10 bed capacity, and the average stay for residents is 2 - 3 months. During their stay, residents must comply with house rules and group living requirements, and assist in fund-raising activities. They also learn to use job-seeking skills and opportunities directed toward the goal of finding permanent employment and securing independent living accommodations. The US Mission belongs to the Omaha area "Continuum of Care" housing system, working with other local social agencies such as the Francis House. The US Mission also receives donations of clothing and furniture which are provided to those in need.

For more information concerning the United States Mission program, or if you know anyone who could benefit from the housing program or is in need of furniture or clothing, please call Peggy or Waco at 553-6773.

by Sue Wilwerding



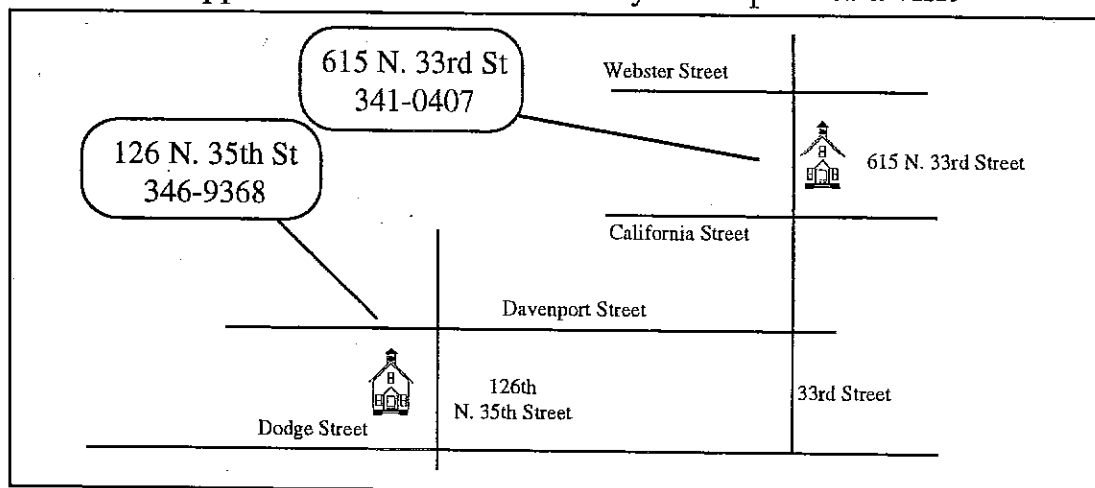
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- * Saturday care at our corporate site

Appointments are not necessary so drop in for a visit



11th Annual Holiday Banquet a Festive Occasion For GPNA Members

The approximately 100 individuals who attended the 11th Annual GPNA Holiday Banquet were treated to a wonderful meal, elegant table settings, a fine program, and great door prizes. The delicious meal of turkey with all the trimmings was prepared by **Master Chef Roy Mauricio**, who also helped serve the dinner along with **Leann Kelly** and **Kevin Smith**. **Rich Stanko**, St. Joseph Hospital CEO, welcomed everyone to the dinner and accepted a Christmas wreath (from Bradley's Florist) given to the hospital by the GPNA in appreciation not only for hosting the banquet but also for all of the other assistance that St. Joseph's provides to the Association throughout the year. (The wreath was displayed in the main entryway to the hospital.) Dinner was served after **Mel Beckman** offered an opening prayer. After dinner, **Subby Anzaldo** addressed the group briefly. Then, thanks to **Wayne** and **Peg Hill** of the **California Street Bar**, everyone was taken on a trip down memory lane - 33rd Street in the late 1940's and 1950's, by way of an eleven-minute video which they narrated. (Longtime business owner **Tom Bogard** was seen in several of the scenes.) **Chris Foster**, GPNA President, then acknowledged approximately 25 individuals and families who were recognized for their current and past volunteer work for the GPNA. After that came the announcement of the GPNA Neighbor of the Year, **Harry Dirgo**, who was introduced by **Terry Wilwerding**. The finale of the evening was the awarding of door prizes, which were generously donated by **Loren Johnson**, **Brad Bogard**, and **Subby Anzaldo**, and the unique "Friendship Brownie" table decorations made by **Jean Peck**.

As with any project like the holiday banquet, the hard work and effort by many volunteers helped to make the evening a big success. Besides the individuals already mentioned, the GPNA would like to thank **Jim & Kathleen Wilwerding** and **Sallie Foster** for manning the reception table, **Joshua Derr** for setting up the video projector, and **Karen Kealy & Lisa Fairbairn** from St. Joseph Hospital who helped make the arrangements. A special thanks goes to the members of the Holiday Banquet Committee who called all GPNA members to take reservations: **Candy Bacome**, **Nadja Wilwerding**, **Eva Swanson**, **Jan Franks**, **Marlene Wilwerding**, **Brad Bogard**, **Kathleen Wilwerding**, and **Jean Peck**, who chaired the group.

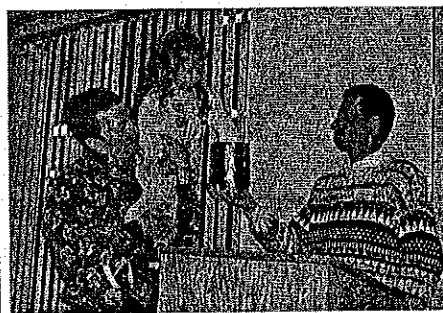
Note: Many people who attended the banquet were interested in obtaining the recipe for the "friendship brownie" mix that **Jean Peck** made for the table decorations. Copies of the recipe will be available at the general meeting, **January 6th**, at St. Joseph Hospital.



Chef Roy Mauricio, center, prepared a wonderful meal for the banquet. Helping him serve the buffet was Kevin Smith and Leann Kelly. Incidentally, Leann has served at all 11 of the GPNA Holiday Banquets! Thanks for the great service! ...



Subby Anzaldo stops to chat with Wayne and Peg Hill. One of the highlights of the evening was the video of 33rd Street in the 40's and 50's. It was fun trying to identify the landmarks of the area.



The kids at the banquet had a great time. In the upper photo, Brad Bogard helps his daughter, Janine, pull a lucky name. In the lower photo, the Peck and Whelan kids get into the spirit of the season by sharing a book.



(Photos by Terry Wilwerding)

OPD'S Citizens Academy Taking Applications For Next Class

The Omaha Police Department's Citizens Academy started in March of 1998. It provides participants with an in-depth overview of the operations of the Omaha Police Department. Some of the topics covered are: Defensive Tactics, Firearms Safety, Officer Safety, Mounted Patrol, K-9 Patrol, Air Support (Helicopters), Chaplains Program, Metro Unit, and others. Each participant will have an opportunity to go on a "Ride-Along" with an on-duty officer, and to participate in other simulated police activities. **Participants must attend at least seven of the eight sessions to obtain the "Certificate of Participation".**

Participants must submit an application vowing they are at least 18 years of age, list their Social Security number, home telephone number, and current address. All applicants will receive a police background and criminal history check. Participant selection is based on review of past criminal and driving history, with individuals showing a propensity toward illegal activity being declined participation. The next class begins **Tuesday, Jan. 18**, from 6 - 9 pm and runs for 9 weeks. The application deadline is **Tuesday, Jan. 4**. For more information or applications, contact the **Police Community Resource Center, Crossroads Mall, 444-3478**, the front desk at the **OPD Central Station, 505 S. 15th St., 444-5889**, or the **OPD Training Unit, 3534 S. 108th St., 444-5601**.

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7:00 AM - 11:00 PM Friday thru Saturday

8:00 AM - 10:00 PM Sunday

What's Happening in the Neighborhood . . .

The Kellom Pen-Pal Program is underway, with the first batch of letters delivered before Christmas. This program is an excellent way for the children to work on their written communication skills - and they're a lot of fun for the participating GPNA members to read! Thanks to **Dana Carlton**, Kellom Liaison, for collecting and distributing the letters, and to those neighbors who are participating in the program. Speaking of Kellom, the mentoring program is still looking for volunteers to help students with various learning activities during regular school hours. Timing of the sessions can be flexible to accommodate volunteer schedules. For more information, call **Jo Kubik** at **344-0441**.

Christmas In April Omaha is accepting applications from low-income elderly and disabled homeowners who need home repairs but are unable to afford to hire the work done or do not have the physical ability to do the work themselves. This is a free program with the work done by volunteers and trade professionals. To qualify, homeowners must live east of 52nd Street, be 62 years of age or older or have a permanent disability, and meet income guidelines. All homes must be structurally sound, and there are limitations on the type of work that can be done. For more information, or to request an application, call **965-9170**.

Augustana Lutheran Church's next "Saturday Night Alive" contemporary jazz worship service will be held **Saturday, January 15th, at 5:00 p.m. at 38th and Lafayette**. The service blends the spirituality of jazz with the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Come to worship and stay afterwards for refreshments. For more information, call Augustana at 551-4728 or E-mail at augustan@novia.net.

The **Cathedral Flower Festival** will be held on **January 29th and 30th at St. Cecilia's Cathedral, 40th and Webster**. Local florists deck the entryway, aisles, altar, side chapels, and other nooks and crannies of the 90-year-old cathedral. Admission is free. See the Omaha World-Herald for information on times the exhibit is open.



Christmas Tree Recycling Program Information

The Environmental Quality Division of the City of Omaha Public Works Department is once again providing collection sites for Christmas tree recycling. On **January 2, 8, and 9 from 10 AM to 4 PM**, volunteers will be at the sites to help unload trees. If trees are dropped off at another time, please throw your tree up on the pile, which will leave room for others to access the site. Please remove the following from the tree before bringing it to the collection site: nails, ornaments, plastic bags, wires, tree stands, and lights. Wreaths and evergreen roping *will not* be accepted. Flocked trees are acceptable. The 3 sites closest to the Gifford Park area are:
Ak-Sar-Ben (Mercy Road and 69th St. Entrance) - Parking Lot #6 (east of entrance gate)
Orchard Park (66th and Hartman Ave.)
Brown Park ("U" St. between 15th and 18th Sts.)

Share the Christmas spirit and ask a neighbor if you can help them get their tree to a recycling site. All sites will close on **January 12** - please **do not** deliver trees after this date. For more information, call **492-9955** then select **category 6823**. Thank you for making Christmas tree recycling part of your holiday tradition!



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 _____