



Gifford Park's Pride

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

December 2000

A Publication of the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association

Candlelight Vigil Held for Chandler Family

The GPNA held a candlelight vigil for the Chandler family and our neighborhood on Friday night, November 17 in Gifford Park. The purpose of the vigil was to remember the young victims, **Latora Chandler**, 13, and **Tramar Chandler**, 7, who were found dead in their family's apartment at 521 N. 33rd St. on Sunday, November 12. Their mother **Judy Chandler** remains hospitalized in very critical condition and there is very little new information about the investigation at the time of this newsletter.

The vigil began with a prayer by **Pastor David Showalter** from Lighthouse Church, then GPNA Vice President **Peter Cihunka** shared some words about the tragedy and dedicated a tree to the memories of the Chandler children. **Sharon Hudson**, a member of the Chandler family, thanked the community for their support. The group of about 200 people then walked by the apartment to 33rd & California and back to the park with a closing prayer by **Deacon Joe Archibald** from St. Cecilia's Cathedral. **Father Sebastian** from Cathedral was also present to help support the family. A memorial fund for the children has been set up at **Commercial Federal Bank**; donations can be made at any Omaha branch office. If anyone has information regarding this tragedy, please call the police or **Crimestoppers (444-STOP)**. The GPNA has made donations to both the Chandler family and Crimestoppers.

The GPNA and the Chandler Family appreciate the support by everyone who participated in the vigil.



Next Meeting

Thursday, December 7
7:00 P.M.



*Holiday
Banquet*



St. Joseph's Hospital
Glassed-In Area of Cafeteria
See Page 3 for details on
the Holiday Banquet!

GPNA Lighting Contest To Be Held In December

The GPNA will again be sponsoring our annual **Holiday Lighting & Decorating Contest** that is open to anyone living in the Association's boundaries. All you have to do to enter is decorate your house with lights or other displays of the holiday season and make sure it's illuminated on **Sunday evening, December 17th**. A panel of judges will travel throughout the neighborhood and choose what they consider to be the best displays. Each of the top displays will be awarded a \$10 gift certificate to **California Tacos**. Last year the GPNA awarded five gift certificates. The purpose of the contest is to encourage residents to decorate their homes for the holidays which in turn brightens up the whole neighborhood. Let's show the rest of the city that Gifford Park residents have the holiday spirit!



Happy Holidays from the GPNA!

GPNA OFFICERS**PRESIDENT**

Chris Foster 342-6006

VICE PRESIDENT

Peter Cihunka 341-7293

RECORDING SECRETARY

Vicki Frey 344-0557

TREASURER

Dana Carlton 346-4575

COMMITTEE CHAIRS**ADVERTISING**

Dor Sweeney 345-0125

CLEAN UP

Mike Wilverding 341-8224

COMPELLANCE

Leo Wilverding 345-1433

COURTESY

Candy Bacome 933-7506

HISTORIAN

Eva Swanson 345-1767

MEMBERSHIP

Chris Foster 342-6006

NEWSLETER

Sue Wilverding 342-2795

NEWSLETER DISTRIBUTION

Mike Bacome 933-7506

PARK

Roger Freeman 557-2914

PARKING VIOLATIONS

Terry Wilverding 342-2795

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Leo Wilverding 345-1433

TOOL LENDING

Chris Foster 342-6006

WATCH GROUP

Mike Wilverding 341-8224

WEEDS COMMITTEE

Jim Wilverding 551-1344

WELLS SCHOOL LIAISON

Dana Carlton 346-4575

The President's Column . . . by Chris Foster

I hope everyone had a good Thanksgiving and had a chance to spend time with family and friends. With Christmas and New Year's fast approaching, please keep safety and health at the top of your list. Safety and health seem to hit closer to home this holiday season for our neighborhood when thinking of the Chandler family tragedy that occurred at 521 N. 33rd St. on November 12. I will discuss this matter in more detail further in my article, but first I want us to keep in mind the many positive activities going on in the Gifford Park neighborhood. I encourage you to read the articles highlighting recent events including the fall cleanup, PKA-GPNA Haunted House, and park planting project. Upcoming events include the holiday decorating contest and of course our annual holiday banquet hosted again by our great neighbors at St. Joseph's Hospital. Our historian Eva Swanson will have history books on hand (see ad on page 4 for details) – extra copies will also be available to buy and take with you, so remember to bring money (\$6 for black & white, \$12 for color). So despite some of the recent negative activities, we certainly have much to be thankful for.

I want to share the following statement issued to newspaper and television media the morning after the tragedy. I believe it generally relays the facts and feelings the GPNA has about the situation: *"The Gifford Park Neighborhood Association (GPNA) deeply regrets the terrible tragedy that occurred Sunday November 12 at 521 N. 33rd Street. Our thoughts are with the families and friends of the victims. This incident has shocked and saddened our neighborhood as we struggle to find answers to why this happened. This location has had a history of serious problems for many years including code violations, drugs, assaults, harassment and other illegal activities. These chronic problems make this incident even more tragic because the GPNA has continually reported these problems to the Police, Narcotics Unit, City Building Inspectors, Health Department, Section 8 Housing, City Prosecutors Office, Douglas County Attorney's Office and the property owner. Our neighborhood association has also had neighborhood walks on 33rd Street on a regular basis since April and our Watch Group patrols these streets every Friday and Saturday night. These activities are done in an effort to improve public safety in our neighborhood, particularly around 33rd and California Street. Obviously all these efforts failed to prevent this latest incident. All we can do at this point is to find out what happened and do whatever it takes to prevent a tragedy like this from ever happening again in our neighborhood. The GPNA is even more saddened because two of the victims are children. We have many events and activities geared toward children in our neighborhood. For this to happen in the heart of our neighborhood is difficult to comprehend."*

The above should not be a surprise to anyone. In fact it seems like a broken record when it comes to public safety issues around 33rd & California – it's the #1 priority of the GPNA. So why did this tragedy occur and why do other crimes continue to dog this area? Some of the obvious questions come up: What if there had been more police presence in this problem area? What if we had more participation on our neighborhood walks? What if neighbors would have called 911 when they suspected something unusual? What if the landlord and property manager would have been more proactive with solving known problems over the years? What if attorneys and judges issued appropriate penalties to individuals convicted of crimes in our neighborhood? As our Vice President Peter Cihunka said during the neighborhood vigil on Friday night, November 17, "...we are ALL accountable for watching out for each other and making sure our neighborhood is safe, and this tragedy serves as a wake up call to awareness."

So what do we do as a neighborhood association to help the situation? We must continue to work with police and other officials to enforce current laws and ordinances. Several of us plan to meet this month with police to discuss specific issues affecting our neighborhood. During the week of the murders, the GPNA Board also met with the owner and property manager of the 521 N. 33rd St. building to discuss on-going problems. There's no question that many of our neighborhood problems occur because absentee or uncaring landlords allow their property to become an environment for criminal activity. Yet it is proven that many landlords in our area have been very proactive in screening tenants and maintaining their property, and able to make good money. And finally, we ask each of you in the neighborhood to do your part by observing and reporting on problems or code violations, because even seemingly small issues may actually be more effective in the long run in deterring criminal behavior than counting on a "major" bust. We are ALL accountable for improvement in our neighborhood.

*The Gifford Park Neighborhood Association
requests your presence at the*

12th Annual Holiday Banquet

*to be held
at 7 p.m. on December 7nd
at St. Joseph's Hospital
601 N. 30th Street
in the glassed-in (Becic) dining room
south of the cafeteria.*

*St. Joseph's Hospital graciously
demonstrates its support of the
GPNA by hosting this annual event
for members.*

*There is no cost - you just need
to be a GPNA member.*

*Please bring a canned good item which
will be donated to a local charitable agency*



SAINT JOSEPH HOSPITAL
AT CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER



Annual Haunted House a Boo-tiful Event

The 6th Annual PKA (Pi Kappa Alpha) Creighton University Fraternity-GPNA Haunted House was opened to Gifford Park neighborhood children, free of charge, on Sunday, October 29. The mild but stormy weather cut short the event early (before 7 p.m.) and cut down on the number of kids going though. However for those who braved the elements (and ghosts) it was well worth it.

After going through the house, the youngsters were treated to a variety of "goodies" provided by GPNA volunteers. Many thanks to **Jason Wheeler** and **Brent DePhillips** of PKA who organized the event, and the following GPNA members who donated treats: **Terry & Sue Wilwerding**, **Eva Swanson**, **Jim & Kathleen Wilwerding**, **Ron & Vicki Frey**, **Peter Cihunka**, **Mark & Sandy Saner**, **Mike & Nadja Wilwerding**, **Betty Slayden**, **Chris & Sallie Foster**, **Mike & Candy Bacome**, **Kirk & Jean Peck**, **Leo & Marlene Wilwerding** and **Dana Carlton**. Thanks also to those who helped with "crowd control" for the evening: **Peter Cihunka**, **Jim Wilwerding**, **Ron Frey**, **Chris Foster**, **Mike Wilwerding**, **Terry Wilwerding** and the **Slayden family**. Again many thanks to the PKA Fraternity for hosting this annual event.

2000 Fall Cleanup Report

This year's fall cleanup, held on Saturday, October 28, in Gifford Park, had some competition – the Oklahoma-Nebraska football game was on the same day! However, with great October weather and lots of help, the cleanup once again lived up to expectations. We filled 3 dumpsters, gave away 50 pumpkins, collected \$170 in memberships and donations, collected \$16 worth of tires, and did a pretty good job of cleaning up a few vacant lots and problem locations. We wouldn't expect anything less with **Mike Wilwerding** again leading the Gifford Park cleanup efforts. Volunteers included **Bob & Virginia Hutton**, **Peter Cihunka**, **Linda Chapman**, **Jim & Kathleen Wilwerding**, **Mike & Candy Bacome**, **Kirk & Jean Peck**, **Terry Wilwerding**, **Harry Dirgo**, **Lloyd Canfield**, **Roger Freeman**, **Jim Kyler**, **Chris Foster**, **Steve Wilwerding**, **Billy Dooly** and **Leo Wilwerding**. Special thanks goes to these businesses who helped make the cleanup possible: **Brad Bogard** of **California Tacos**, **Loren Johnson**, owner of **J'N'J Grocery** and **Wayne and Peg Hill** of the **California Bar** for providing food and drink for volunteers. **Baker's** on **Saddlecreek** gave us a good price on the pumpkins. **Ken Labs Trash** supplied the dumpsters. **St. Joseph's Hospital** again provided a truck and driver **Rodney Hay**. **Rich Kaster**, who lives in the neighborhood and works for **Jensen Tires**, allowed us to get rid of the tires for no charge. Thanks also to **Eva Swanson** for baking cookies and **James Watson** for a nice donation. And it would be a mistake not to give a big thanks to **Mike's wife Nadja** for her support during **Mike's** tenure as cleanup chairman. These cleanups don't just happen - it takes a lot of time, commitment, and preparation.



What's Happening In The Neighborhood . . .

Please keep **Rich Exline** and his family in your thoughts over the holidays. Rich's mother **Pearl** passed away on November 10 at Immanuel Hospital due to complications from heart surgery in October. When he and Pearl lived in the neighborhood near 34th & Cass, Rich was one of the most active GPNA members, especially on Watch Group, cleanups, and keeping an eye on 33rd & California.

The GPNA sends our condolences to the family of Northeast Precinct Captain **Pitmon Foxall III**. Captain Foxall lost his father, **Pitmon Foxall II**, in November. He retired as Captain in the Omaha Police Department.

Congratulations to **Chip Maxwell** who is the new State Legislator for our district. Chip won the November 7th election over **Scott Knudsen**. Both candidates were very impressive at the October Candidates Forum at St. Joseph's Hospital and ran very positive campaigns.

Many thanks to City Councilman **Bob Sivick** for being guest speaker at our November general meeting. Bob answered a variety of questions including downtown development and its impact on our neighborhood, the chances of hiring more housing inspectors, and public safety issues on 33rd & California including adding more police presence. We appreciate Bob's insight and taking the time to visit us, especially since he and his wife just had their first child three days before our meeting. Congratulations to the Sivick family!

Indian Creek Nursery continues to plant trees in Gifford Park with completion of the project expected soon. **Roger Freeman** has agreed to head up the **City Adopt-A-Park project**. We have a number of volunteers for this project but would like more. The plan is to perform maintenance activities on a regular basis from spring through fall to keep our park looking good. Call **342-6006** to add your name to the list of helpers. Gifford Park Day is planned for April or May next spring - contact **Peter Cihunka (341-7293)** with ideas or to volunteer.

Please note there will be **NO GPNA Executive Board Meeting** in December. As busy as the GPNA has been this year, the least we can do is break during the holiday season.

Please reserve my order for **HISTORY OF 33RD & CALIFORNIA PLUS HISTORY OF THE GPNA**

_____ Copies illustrated in color (\$12.00 each - tax included)
or

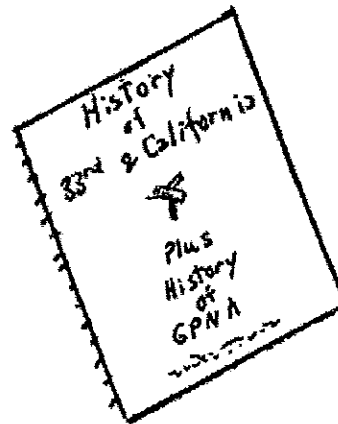
_____ Copies illustrated in black and white (\$6.00 each - tax included)

Name (please print)

Address

City, State, and Zip Code

Phone Number



Amount enclosed

Mail to: Eva Swanson
3417 Webster St.
Omaha, NE 68131

Checks are payable to the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association