

Lead Story proposed on Neighborhood Centers Incorporated and its projects at All Saints Neighborhood Center and Park (also sent by e mail)

Motorists have been pausing in astonishment at the corner of Longworth and Mullane, over the past two years. There, just a block west of Springwells St, between W. Fort and W. Vernor, something amazing has been happening. All Saints Neighborhood Center at 8300 Longworth underwent a striking transformation. Like many area homes, the original beauty was hidden under a cocoon of multiple layers of siding that added insulation but made the former church look drab and homely.

The butterfly that emerged has all the charm that its builders envisioned in 1920. Contractors removed three layers of imitation brick and fiberboard. They filled wall cavities with blown-in insulation. They installed new thermal windows. They patched, primed and painted original cedar siding with tasteful bright colors. The restored historic appearance tells all what a beautiful neighborhood this once was and can become again.

Neighborhood Centers Incorporated (NCI) runs All Saints Neighborhood Center. NCI secured the funding for and managed the renovation process. Many outstanding agencies serve southwest Detroit. Some focus on housing, some on counseling, and others on education. NCI is making neighborhoods the center of its work. "What can we do to make neighborhoods beautiful and exciting places for a child to grow up in? How can we make them places that adults are confident to buy or build homes in?" Dennis Nordmoe, NCI's Executive Director, says these questions drive what his agency does.

Historic buildings, for all their charm, are often not functional for current needs. Converting an old church into a multi-purpose community center meeting all modern safety, air quality, access, energy conservation and use requirements is a challenge. NCI employed Silveri Architects to guide the process. Now the building has met or exceeded all of those requirements. The interior's beautification matches that of the exterior. All Saints Neighborhood Center now hosts activities that meet adult and youth needs in a setting that is dignified, safe, comfortable and inspiring.

People were just getting used to seeing the Center's new look when a park sprung up across the street. Sheltered by a dramatic steel pavilion, parents watch their children climb over the challenging playscape. A tire swing seems constantly in motion. Joggers, walkers and bikers of every age use a paved path 1/9 of a mile long. Wayne County, local businesses and a broad donor base contributed to NCI's creation of the park. A new grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation will add a sod playing field, power, water, and theme gardens to the park.

Nordmoe says his NCI Board believes that just as shopping mall are anchored by major stores, so neighborhoods are anchored by creating a beautiful center for neighborhood life. Their hope is that residents will be inspired to invest in home improvements and new homes keeping pace with the larger community's investment in their lives through the neighborhood center and park.

NCI grew out of an initiative of All Saints Parish (7824 W. Fort St.) to build community hope by starting a neighborhood center at the former St. Peter Lithuanian Church. Dennis Nordmoe was recruited to lead the project. NCI used private donor gifts to leverage major grants from the City of Detroit, from foundations (McGregor, Carls, Knight, United Way) and an investment from Wayne County to create the Center and the Park.

A raffle (see ad) will allow NCI to continue and expand its quest to support "successful families in healthy neighborhoods."

Dennis Nordmoe, December 26, 2008, 313-549-0435