

Little Italy Neighborhood Making New Strides

The bayfront and downtown Erie have drawn a lot of attention in recent weeks. But another inner-city area has been making new strides as well.

Erie's Little Italy neighborhood near W. 18 between Liberty and Sassafras Streets, has seen a 27 percent drop in crime according to Erie's Weed and Seed program. As a result, people's sense of safety and community pride have dramatically increased, attracting business investment and housing development to the historic neighborhood.

Opening Doors To Homeownership

On Wednesday, July 26 at 2 p.m., the Sister's of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network in partnership with the Housing And Neighborhood Development Service (HANDS) and the Erie Redevelopment Authority will host an open house and dedication ceremony at a completely renovated home at 427 W. 18th Street.

The two-story house was originally built as a single family home in the early 1900's. Years later it was sold and carved up into three rental units, which became grossly neglected and uninhabitable in recent years.

When purchased for rehab last spring, the house was structurally sound, but the interior was in deplorable condition, according to Charles Scalise, HANDS Executive Director. "The ceilings were falling, the pipes were cracked and windows were broken."

In three months time, HANDS converted the uninhabitable to a very comfortable space with new everything including windows, doors, walls, wiring, fixtures, plumbing, furnace, drywall, paint, vinyl siding and roof. Steve Lewis served as general contractor for the project. The 1,260 sq. ft. home now features three bedrooms, two full baths, living room, dining room, kitchen, first floor laundry area, and a wraparound porch. It also has off-street parking in the back along with a large play area. "It's ideal for families with young children and pets, because the lead-based paint issues were addressed as well," Scalise said.

Funding for the project came from City of Erie HOME Investment Partnership funds; the

Erie Redevelopment Authority; and a state grant for Brownfield Housing distributed through Erie County. HANDS helped bring the partners together, put together the funding package, and oversaw the construction.

In all, over \$100,000 went into the renovation. But to make the home viable for income qualified buyers, the home will be offered for just \$65,000, making it both affordable and maintainable. To get the homeowners off to a good start and insure their long term success, the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network center, next door to the property, will mentor the family as needed on handling basic household repairs, budgeting, yard care and more.

The children in the family will have free access to reading, tutoring, cooking, sewing, art therapy classes plus a variety of after-school activities at the center.

According to Sr. Mary Herrmann, the Executive Director of the Neighborhood Network, the agency was established by the Sisters of St. Joseph six years ago to bring about neighborhood revitalization and a sense of ownership among neighborhood residents. In addition to its homeowner support and children's programs, the agency advocates on behalf of area residents in need of assistance with rent, utilities, or food. This program also follows up with residents to deal with the root cause of the problem that prompted them to seek help.

The renovation at 427 W. 18th is the first of several projects planned by the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Erie Redevelopment Authority and HANDS in the Little Italy neighborhood. Another updated property will be available at the end of September at 916 W. 17th Street. Three brand new houses will be constructed between the 300/400 block of W. 17th starting in mid-September. And in early August, the Redevelopment Authority will host a ground-breaking ceremony at a newly acquired property at 504-506 W. 18th Street, which also will be completely renovated.

Contacts:

Charles Scalise
Executive Director
HANDS
459-1047, Ext. 14

Sr. Mary Herrmann
Executive Director
Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network
454-7814

John Elliot
Executive Director
Erie Redevelopment Authority
453-4505

Erlinda Shultz
Longtime Little Italy Resident & Mother of 8
882-6496

Ron Zielinski
Business Owner (Captain Ron's formerly Chrisandra's Bar)
Little Italy homeowner and resident
454-6149 (w)
459-1556 (h)