



"Over-the-Rhine Community Housing is a non-profit organization that works to build and sustain a diverse neighborhood that values and benefits low-income residents.

We focus on developing and managing resident-centered, affordable housing in an effort to promote inclusive community."

We Carry On



Mary Rivers

Long-time Over-the-Rhine resident and activist Nannie Hinkston died February 27. She was 91 years old. With notification of her passing, and now the experience of her funeral Mass, memories flooded in.

There was never a question about where Nannie stood. She was completely grounded in her demands for justice and support of the youth of OTR. I loved when Nannie would get mad and deliver a fiery speech. I loved when buddy would make Nannie laugh. Like other compelling advocates, you couldn't deny her passion or the intensity with which she sought righteousness.

We've lost many of our friends/leaders over the years, yet we carry on and they live on. While their physical presence is gone, their energy has taken a new form. They continue to inspire us, they encourage us to keep going even when we are discouraged.

In their memory we carry on. For justice we carry on. For the families in Hamilton County that don't have affordable housing, we carry on. For the children in our Children's Creative Corner program who said they would pay their mother's rent if they found \$1 million, we carry on. For the mom who worries about paying her rent, her utilities, her children's clothes or school supplies or medical expense, we carry on. For the brother/son and sister/daughter who is homeless and hurting, we carry on.

I am reminded of the Tom Joad character in *Grapes of Wrath* who, as he leaves camp to escape the likelihood of unjust persecution, tells his mother, "Whenever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Whenever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there . . . I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'-I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build-why, I'll be there."

I feel the same about Nannie, buddy, Maurice McCracken, David Crowley, Vivian Kinnebrew, and Bill Graves. Whenever I see a person hurting, I know these gone leaders are all directing us to provide comfort, care, and kindness. Whenever a development project gets so complicated and difficult I know they are all there cheering us to carry on.

This issue of the newsletter highlights the unique way in which we carry on the work of providing affordable housing to low-income Over-the-Rhine residents. David Elkins, director of the Jimmy Heath House, puts our work in support of long-time residents in a broad perspective. This is followed by Andy Hutzell's, Director of Housing Services, summary of services OTRCH provides to previously homeless persons. Tanya Murphy, Director of Property Management, shares what it takes for OTRCH to provide the level of service needed by our tenants. Thea Munchel, project Manager, summarizes the two new projects which are near construction. We close this issue with an update of Children's Creative Corner, an inspiring story of perseverance and success, and our volunteer program.

As always, many thanks for your support of OTRCH and of long-time residents of Over-the-Rhine.

-Mary B. Rivers, Executive Director, mburke@otrch.org

Staying True To Our Mission



Andy Hutzel speaking at the Jimmy Heath House ribbon cutting ceremony, December 2010

OTRCH started in 1978 as a small housing cooperative called ReSTOC (Race Street Tenant Housing Cooperative), named after ReSTOC's first building, which was located on Race Street. The primary mission of ReSTOC was to be a place where previously homeless residents of the Drop Inn Center could access safe, affordable housing. Before ReSTOC, there were no housing options for persons leaving the Drop Inn Center, as landlords refused housing referrals from the DIC.



ReSTOC's first building

Thanks to the efforts of Strategies to End Homelessness, Greater Cincinnati's organization "To coordinate resources toward ending homelessness", and The Partnership Center, there has been a great improvement in housing for formerly homeless persons in the past 34 years. These two groups have been instrumental in securing federal, state and local resources to better serve homeless persons. That is not to say that every homeless person has the opportunity for housing. Cincinnati still has a way to go.

At OTRCH we are doing what we can. In 2012, we placed 215 homeless men, women, and families into permanent, OTRCH housing. While a majority of our referrals still come from the Drop Inn Center, we also work closely with other homeless service providers including the Interfaith Hospitality Network, Lighthouse Youth Services, City Gospel Mission, and Bethany House Services. In 2013, we plan to add another 50 housing placements for chronically homeless men and women.



Jimmy Heath House residents and Program Director David Elkins (far right) volunteering.

Last month Mary Burke Rivers wrote about coming out to the office lobby because of a burning smell. She learned that a woman who had spent the last several weeks living in the woods, using a campfire to keep warm, had come to find safe, affordable housing. It is great to know that we can help her, the same way we helped people in her situation 34 years ago. She is one of OTRCH's newest residents.

- Andy Hutzel, Director of Housing Services, ahutzel@otrch.org

Reflecting on Our Beloved Community

Over-the-Rhine is being transformed. Washington Park is new again. There are new businesses, restaurants, and buildings. The aged and battered Italianate facades that make up the cherished architecture of the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood are being rejuvenated. I hear that these changes represent progress. I understand that any progress holds, in one sense or another, a negation of what came before it. As the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood is transformed, rejuvenated, and re-imagined, the questions arise; "What exactly is being negated in this transformation?" "What is it that the new replaces?"

There are two main narratives which seem to compete in answering these questions of change, progress, and negation. One narrative suggests that the new park, parking garage, businesses, and construction replace urban blight, crime, substance abuse, and poverty. This narrative suggests that new condos are taking the place of homeless camps and the need for low-income, affordable housing. It also suggests that entrepreneurship negates poverty and ownership negates homelessness. Residents of Over-the-Rhine are transformed from transients and apartment dwellers in a community, to stakeholders in a business and development enterprise.

In contrast there is a counter narrative, frequently offered by many long-time Over-the-Rhine community members, which suggests that the ongoing development negates community and family ties in the neighborhood. These folks offer a narrative where community voices speak louder than wealth and connections. In this narrative, development creates affordable housing which is within the financial reach of the people who have lived in the neighborhood for years, and which generates circumstances where the most vulnerable in the community will be able to stay. In this narrative there is grief over the loss of the intangible bonds that have held this community together.

The second narrative is highlighted by an event of last fall. In late October 2012 I was asked by Fred Cook, pastor of the First English Lutheran Church on Race Street, and Andy Hutzal, OTRCH's Director of Housing Services, to help house and provide supportive services to Tommy Banks, the "Mayor of Washington Park." Tommy had 4th stage cancer and needed hospice care. The mayor was homeless and needed a place to die. Pastor Cook had befriended Tommy years ago when Tommy lived, camped, and held court on the steps of First Lutheran. Though Tommy had been homeless for most of his life in Over-the-Rhine, he was still a longstanding and well-liked member of the Over-the-Rhine community. Pastor Cook rallied help for Tommy, and I was impressed by the response of the community when one of its most vulnerable members was down. People and resources came from Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, Drop Inn Center case management, St Francis Seraph, Redeemer Church, and an enclave of Pastor Cook's colleagues in the inner-city ministry.

I also watched as Pastor Cook, who was acting as Tommy's power of attorney, struggled with health care providers and authorities for whom Tommy was "just" a homeless alcoholic. I witnessed the pastor's distress as he worked to affirm Tommy's dignity and decision-making, and understood the pastor's frustration that Tommy's ashes would end up in a numbered spot where no stone could ever be placed.

Though Tommy only lived another month, the mayor's final days highlighted how different these two narratives are, and what they mean for the Over-the-Rhine community. For me, Tommy will always be there when I see Washington Park, and I will always see the men and women who used to sit on the low stone wall there that fronted on 12th street before the park's transformation. The dueling narratives will run through my head, and again I will conclude that it is the people, and that means all the people, who really make Over-the-Rhine a community. I am happy that I have been allowed to witness, and be part of a community, willing to come together to help its most vulnerable members.

- David Elkins, *Jimmy Heath House Program Coordinator*, delkins@otrch.org

Property Management

Farewell Crescenda!

In many, if not most, respects Over-the-Rhine Community Housing's approach to property management is similar to that of any other owner of rental property. We advertise our units, carefully screen potential residents, collect rent, repair and maintain properties, send late notices, and, when necessary, carry out evictions. Like any other property manager which accepts a rental subsidy, we also keep units to acceptable standards and provide annual proof that residents with rental subsidy continue to meet income guidelines. However, because of our commitment to providing safe, affordable housing to low-income OTR residents, we do even more.



Crescenda Parson

Living on a very low income is not easy. Stress is a part of living in poverty. We at OTRCH know that in the case of some residents, there is the need for additional support. We go an extra mile, and provide help when that is needed so residents can stay in OTRCH housing. In some instances that help is provided by our resident services coordinator, Amy Silver. In others it is provided by our property management staff. Since October 2009 that service has been provided by Crescenda Parson. After 3½ years of service, Crescenda recently left OTRCH to help develop a property management system for a private-sector owner.

In saying farewell and best wishes at our recent staff meeting, a colleague said this about Crescenda, "I have on several occasions had the opportunity to work with Crescenda on issues of tenant behavior and housing retention. I have always been impressed by her ability to share concrete information with tenants and to couple that with concrete solutions that provided a way forward for the tenant. In her practice as mediator, I feel she was always objective. She always made clear her expectations, and took the time to explain why those expectations were important. In my mind, Crescenda plays on a level field, where anyone has the opportunity to change and to grow. I think Crescenda acknowledged through her practice that the basis of that change was mutual understanding."



Tanya Murphy and Cynthia Talbert

Crescenda was an important part of OTRCH going the extra mile with tenants. We thank her for her service and wish her well. We are pleased to announce that Cynthia Talbert, previously OTRCH's leasing agent, will assume responsibility for these supportive services. In accepting the position, Cynthia said, "I am so pleased to work with an organization that not only provides safe, affordable housing to low-income residents of Over-the-Rhine, but understands the need for tenant support, and is committed to providing it."

- Tanya Murphy, Director of Property Management,
tmurphy@otrch.org

Housing Development

1405-07 Republic Street

1405-07 Republic has the potential to be an affordable island in a sea of 130 units of market-rate units currently under construction by 3CDC within a 2 block radius. The building will provide 13 apartments for individuals and families with low incomes. The 1405 development will involve a complete renovation of the vacant five-story Italianate-style building. Renovation of the building will include many updates to the building, originally constructed in 1895. The scope of work includes the addition of an elevator, individual HVAC units, on-site laundry facilities, and market-rate finishes.

Like a number of our projects, this one requires the commitment of several different funding sources, including historic preservation tax credits, HOME funds from the city, and Housing Trust Funds from the state. Students from Miami University have been extremely valuable in the pre-development efforts on the project. Work began through the Miami University Center for Community Engagement (MUCCE) Atelier Program in 2010. MUCCE students worked in the offices of CR Architects + Design where they developed the initial design concept, part 1 and part 2 approvals from the National Park Service (required for the historic preservation tax credit), and applied for state historic tax credits.



1405-07 Republic



INTERIOR PERSPECTIVE

Rednering of what the interior of 1405-07 Republic could look like upon renovation. *image courtesy of Miami University*

Currently, we are using the student design work to secure financing on the project. We are cautiously optimistic that construction on this project will begin in the fall of 2013.

Update on 1500 Elm

In March 2012, OTRCH was awarded a Housing and Urban Development Grant (Section 202) to develop the historic Italianate building. The renovation, which will provide affordable housing for seniors, is called Elm Street Senior Housing and is located at 1500 Elm Street. This development will meet the growing needs of low (80% of area median income or AMI) to very-low income (50% of AMI) Over-the-

Rhine elderly residents by providing the only subsidized senior housing project in the neighborhood.

The development of Elm Street Senior Housing will create fourteen apartments for income-qualifying seniors. Each apartment is 470-540 square feet, and contains a bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, and living/dining room. All units will have a number of special design features which will enable the residents to live there for the rest of their lives, "aging in place". The renovation will include a full-size elevator, added to the rear of the building, providing the residents with access to all floors. The street level of the building will be used for administrative and community space. Though the renovation will make major changes, we will respect the historic integrity of the building. The fourteen units of senior housing that this project will create only begins to address the growing needs of seniors in the community.

Watch for the announcement of the ground-breaking. Construction will begin this spring, and be completed by the end of the year!

-Thea Munchel, Project Manager, tmunchel@otrch.org

A look back into our history: 1418 Republic Street

Renovated by ReSTOC and generous volunteers 1985-1987



Thank you *Miss Nina!*

When the seeds of Children's Creative Corner were planted in summer 2007, no one could have predicted what the program become. The beginning was very simple. Several OTRCH residents asked for more activities to serve youth in the neighborhood. The response was made by the effort of five friends, including Amy Silver (then a part of the Miami University OTR Residency Program and now OTRCH's Resident Services Coordinator), and began with Art in the Park, a summertime program held twice weekly on Republic Street. It was the perfect example of what a small group of passionate individuals can accomplish. Turnout was strong, and as the summer drew to a close, no one could see a reason why the art classes had to close as well.

In the intervening six years, CCC has gone through its share of turns and changes. After meetings in the park came to a close, classes moved to the Peaslee Neighborhood Center, and then to the first floor of buddy's place (1300 Vine Street), before settling into the current space at 220 E. Clifton Avenue, where class has been held for over four years.



Nina Baker and kids from CCC

When you enter CCC and see the walls covered in crafts and many more projects strung from the ceilings, it is difficult to believe that this same space was once the office of Over-the-Rhine Housing Network. The youth of the neighborhood have truly made the room their own, a place where they feel a sense of belonging and stability.

Nina Baker, the program coordinator at CCC since October 2011, has played a major role in establishing this sense of belonging. Always a positive presence in the room, she has shared an abundance of time, talent, and love with the kids through her work. On top of facilitating what has now amounted to nearly 150 unique, thoughtful craft projects during her time as coordinator, Nina has also organized art shows, motivated volunteers, instituted quarterly pizza parties to reward strong class participation, and

collaborated with artists from the community on special projects. She has earned the deep admiration and respect of an incredible number of youth and volunteers, and it is widely known that no one would mind if Nina were to stick around with CCC forever.

Just as life has drawn many different youth to and from the program over the years, however, a time has come in Nina's life to pursue new things as well. The kids have had a wonderful time sharing the past year and a half with her, and when she announced her departure to the class, it was clear how sad everyone will be to see her go. Nonetheless, the years of CCC have offered some perspective to this moment. As Ronnasia calmly pointed out to her peers amidst the disappointment, "You know, Miss Amy used to be in charge!" Things have changed before, and yet, much remains the same.



Bill Haigh, CCC's new Program Coordinator

We are still meeting two evenings per week, still open to all neighborhood youth ages 4 to 14, still free of charge, still built upon the generous contributions of volunteers, and still making art together as a community.

We are all sad to see Nina go, but we are also delighted to welcome back Bill Haigh, who served at OTRCH as an AmeriCorps VISTA from 2007-2009 and was one of the five founding members of CCC, as the new Program Coordinator. We are incredibly grateful to the many volunteers and donors who have supported the program for so many years, and we are excited to see what is in store for the future.

-Bridget Nikol, AmeriCorps VISTA, bnickol@otrch.org

Residents' Spotlight

Martin does not hesitate to tell you that things are going well for him. Martin has an apartment, has completed two Cincinnati Cooks courses, has been recently hired at a restaurant and is feeling strong in his recovery. Perhaps the main reason why he is in such high spirits now is because of the perspective he has gained from his journey in the last year.

One year ago Martin's steady place of employment burned to the ground. This unexpected and massive fire put Martin and many others out of work. He really struggled, explaining, "I lost the ability to cope." Martin slipped in his recovery from drugs and alcohol, remembering, "I had become powerless over my addiction." Life became about feeding his habits and soon Martin found himself without his apartment and all his belongings. He turned to the Drop Inn Center as a place to rest, and a place to start rebuilding his life.

After his first night at DIC, Martin set out with a reaffirmed commitment to himself and his sobriety. He attributes this ability of moving on to a power greater than himself. The first thing he did was to humble himself and walk into an AA meeting at OTRCH's Recovery Hotel, telling those listening that he needed help, "I started to let people help me. I was able to be thoroughly honest for the first time in a long time. That's when things changed."

Days two and three were just as productive as the first. He started to view his time at DIC as his job, putting in applications for employment and housing, "I started feeling good about myself again. My confidence was coming back." Martin heard about Cincinnati Cooks, filled out an application and was soon in the kitchen as a participant in the First Course program. He was the second oldest person in the class, but he was on a mission, "The chefs will tell you that I was.", Martin says with pride. He graduated, with perfect attendance, on December 7, 2012. Martin's success continues with graduation from Second Course at Cincinnati Cooks, and a job offer from a new restaurant at The Banks.

In August, he was approved for an apartment at buddy's place, 1300 Vine Street, OTRCH housing for formerly homeless persons. "Each day", says Martin, "when I walk into my apartment, I feel so much gratitude."

Martin looks at home in his chef's uniform, at home at buddy's place, and at home on his path of hard work and success. When asked what he hopes for in the next five years, Martin talks about his recovery above all else. He desires to stay strong and focused while, "expanding and sharing with others in my life in a positive way, sharing with my family, friends and community."

-Amy Silver, Resident Services Coordinator, asilver@otrch.org

Volunteer Program

“Home is where the heart is. Home’s where you feel safe, can be yourself, and are with your family. Home is a comfortable place where you can relax. Many people have different homes and today helped me realize that...it also made me see how important a home is and how even when you don’t have much, you always need a place to call home.” – Mother of Mercy High School student’s reflection, February 14, 2013

The new year is underway and 2013 marks the 35th year of individuals and groups coming together to lend time, energy, resources, ideas, and support for Over-the-Rhine Community Housing and affordable housing. While the actions and contributions to OTRCH from volunteers are as diverse as the individuals and groups themselves, there is a common thread tying all contributions and the organization together: **the reason why.**

The reason why OTRCH exists, the reason why we offer volunteer opportunities and the reason why volunteers seek such opportunities are one in the same. That reason is: all people deserve a place to call home and it is up to us as a community to work together to provide affordable housing options for individuals and families priced out of the traditional housing market.

For this reason year after year volunteers have continued to show up and lend their many hands. It is impossible to provide an exhaustive list that reflects every contribution volunteers have made to Over-the-Rhine Community Housing’s efforts to develop and sustain affordable housing, and ReSTOC or Over-the-Rhine Housing Network’s efforts in the decades prior, but here are two samples from the archives:

On **Saturday October 24, 1998** volunteers from Ursuline Academy, Miami University, the Drop Inn Center, and Roger Bacon High School spent the morning painting, cleaning, shoveling, and doing yard work at the 1514-16 Elm, 1508 Elm, 21 W. 14th, 1327 Vine, 1511 Vine and other locations in the neighborhood. On **Saturday September 23, 1995** volunteers from Elder High School lead by our current Board President Roger Auer, volunteers from the Drop Inn Center, Miami University, Xavier University, Finneytown High School and interns including Jennifer Summers (currently with Peaslee Community Center in Over-the-Rhine) spent the day at 1402 Republic, 1300 Vine, and 1327-29 Vine working to board up unsecured windows, paint, clean up litter and rubble, and pull nails from floor boards.

In 2013 the list of volunteer accomplishments grows ever longer as our Saturday Morning Volunteer Service program meets week after week, and new types of volunteer contributions are added as our efforts for education and outreach are welcomed into new classrooms and communities. So far this year we have had 161 volunteers present for our Saturday Morning Service Crew, contributing 470 hours of time. Of the 161 volunteers, 54 have been new to our organization and 107 are returning volunteers.

Through the Volunteer Program we have also had educational conversations and given presentations on the relationship between poverty, housing and homelessness to over 150 students, teachers and university professors this year. To extend our education and outreach efforts we also accepted an offer from the University of Cincinnati’s School of Planning to participate in a collaborative project. This semester, under the instruction and leadership of Dr. Beth Nagy, Urban Planning students enrolled in a course titled *Introduction to Geographic Systems* are using their skills and interests to build a database of our properties that will allow us to generate maps and reports at the click of a button. This resource will allow us to visually communicate the scope and scale of our existing affordable housing in Over-the-Rhine as well form and share plans for future community development with staff, volunteers, board members, foundations and donors.

-Briittany Skelton, Volunteer Coordinator, bskelton@otrch.org



ReSTOC volunteers, year unknown

Remembering Nannie Hinkston

In March 1994, as president of the Over-the-Rhine Community Council, Nannie Hinkston was asked what she thought of a judge's decision to throw out a lawsuit brought by a group of business owners who said the concentration of poor people in Over-the-Rhine was too dense. She said she feared the "integration" of higher income people into the neighborhood would force out the poor.

"It's kind of like she saw the future," said fellow affordable housing advocate Bonnie Neumeier, who, to this day, is among those who refers to Hinkston as "the Rosa Parks of Over-the-Rhine."



Ms. Hinkston, who lived in Over-the-Rhine for almost 60 years, died Feb. 27 at the Harmony Court assisted living home in Bond Hill. She was 91.

Born in Covington on May 4, 1921, the youngest of 13 children, Ms. Hinkston moved to Over-the-Rhine in the early 1950s.

Ms. Hinkston was preceded in death by her only child, a son, Lewis, and one of her six grandchildren.

She raised her grandchildren in a small apartment on Race Street, not far from the former Washington Park School, which was torn down in 2007. "She was a lady with great wisdom," said one of her grandchildren, Jo Ann Whitehead, 46, of Avondale. "She was a straight shooter. She spoke her mind and never backed down."

Ms. Hinkston was involved with the Over-the-Rhine Community Council as a neighborhood resident and later served for 12 years as its president. She befriended a young, white advocate for the poor, Buddy Gray, who moved to Over-the-Rhine from Anderson Township and in 1973 opened what would grow to become the region's largest homeless shelter, the Drop Inn Center. Often, Ms. Hinkston, Gray and the Rev. Maurice McCrackin spoke together at Cincinnati City Council or committee meetings on behalf of the poor and minorities in Over-the-Rhine and the West End.

From 1980 to '85, Ms. Hinkston participated in the creation of the Over-the-Rhine Comprehensive Plan, also known as the 5520 Plan. Its goal was to preserve the 5,520 affordable housing units in Over-the-Rhine at that time.

She watched with a keen eye what she perceived as attempts of outside forces, politicians and developers, to bring wholesale change to Over-the-Rhine.

"I want to see development, but don't want pushed out of my neighborhood," she frequently said. Not even 5 feet tall or 100 pounds, Ms. Hinkston walked everywhere, often pushing or pulling her wheeled grocery cart. The strength of her voice belied her petite frame.

Past residents of Over-the-Rhine, and those of her friends who remain, remember her as a consistent, strong voice unafraid to speak up for others like her – the poor.

"Nannie understood the challenges living on little," Neumeier said, "but she shared everything she had."



Over-the-Rhine Community Housing is determined to make Over-the-Rhine a welcoming place - where a diverse group of people live, work and build an engaged and inclusive community. We can't do this alone and we do not want to do this alone. We hope you will join us in our efforts.

Please consider supporting our efforts to build and sustain affordable and comfortable housing for low-income residents of Over-the-Rhine with a tax deductible contribution to Over-the-Rhine Community Housing.

Donate online: www.otrch.org

Donate by mail: 114 West 14th Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202

Thank you!