



Over-the-Rhine Community Housing

WHERE COMMUNITY COMES FIRST

Spring 2015 Newsletter

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Recently I was asked by a reporter, “Why is an inclusive community important?” I was surprised that I didn’t easily have a good answer to that question, which got me to thinking.

When we are separated by the many divisions within our society, it is easier to dismiss people as “the other”. I can take your land. I can ignore your suffering. I can dismiss you and lock you up. However, if we live in the same community we have the opportunity to get to know and value each other. We can learn from each other, support each other in hard times, and celebrate each other’s successes. I think this is true at the inter-personal level. It also seems to be true at the social level. Research shows that communities that invest in the safety net enjoy more successful and sustainable economic growth. I think there is a connection here. Investing in each other results in significant personal and social returns.



In this newsletter you will read about our efforts to build an inclusive community on the 1400 block of Republic Street, focusing on the development of our newest project, Beasley Place. It is named after Willie and Fannie Beasley who lived on, and for, this block for many years (see Page 3). The building also has a history, which we celebrate (Page 2).

These 13 affordable housing units, and those that we own in the same block, are located next to Salazar Restaurant & Bar, and \$300,000 homes. This block of Republic Street has at least the outward makings of an inclusive community. We think there are also the makings of a true community of people (Page 3–4). In addition to completing a fully-renovated building (Page 5), we provide support to those residents who need it so they can overcome barriers and improve their quality of life. The ribbon-cutting for Beasley will be late April or early May. You are invited, and will receive an invitation soon.

My experience is that we can learn from each other, and experience richer, fuller lives, when we broaden our horizon by immersing ourselves in new environments. I have been graced with so many beautiful moments in my 20+ years of working in OTR. I have learned about love of family, love of tradition, and love of family ritual, just like my family. I have learned about steadfastness and commitment to the neighborhood. I have learned that our economy, our justice system, and our world does not always operate fairly. I have learned about making a way out of no way. I have learned how different families celebrate love and loss. What once seemed foreign to me, is now part of me.

Thank you for joining us as we pursue this idea of an inclusive community. What is inclusive community to you, and why is it important?

MARY BURKE RIVERS
Executive Director

THE STORY OF BEASLEY PLACE

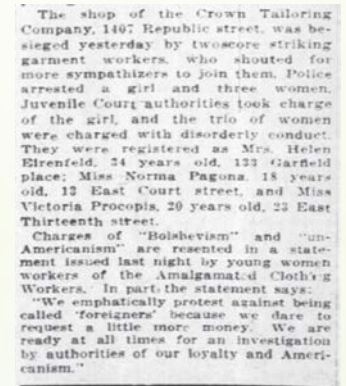
The building we now know as Beasley Place was built at 1405-7 Republic Street in 1897. Previously, several other buildings had existed in the same location since at least 1877, when the street was still known by its original name, Bremen Street. Due to the anti-German sentiment that swept Cincinnati during World War I, the city decided to change several of the more overtly German street names. So, in August 1918, Bremen Street officially became known as Republic Street.

Throughout much of its early history, Republic Street remained a quiet, predominantly residential street, and for the most part Beasley Place was a quiet, residential building. Many people and families lived in the building, but during the early 1900s a few small businesses set up shop on the bottom floor. The very first business to open in Beasley Place was the Louis Soal Tailor Shop (often known as the Crown Tailoring Company). Founded by Soal, an Austrian immigrant, the shop was located on the first floor of 1407 from 1898 to 1920. Soal was evidently not the most benevolent of businessmen, because on March 27,

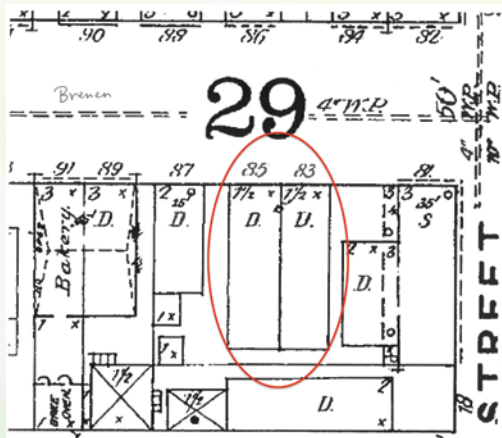
1919, Beasley Place was the site of a protest demonstration. According to the Cincinnati Enquirer, roughly 40 garment workers took to Republic Street, just outside of Soal's shop, to protest their low wages. The police arrested four women, charging them with disorderly conduct. Shortly thereafter, Soal's shop moved to a new location on Central Avenue.



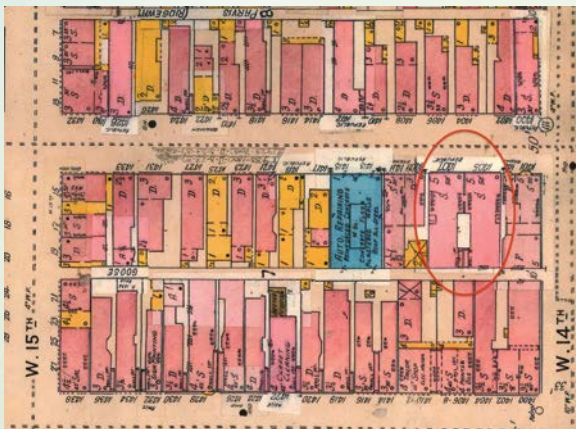
Crown Tailoring Company HelpWanted Advertisement



"Disorderly Conduct", Cincinnati Enquirer March 28, 1919



1891 Map of 1405-7 Republic Buildings (at the time 83-5 Bremen)



THE NAMING OF BEASLEY PLACE

Over-the-Rhine Community Housing is naming its soon to be completed, 13-unit affordable housing project at 1405-07 Republic Street in recognition and memory of Willie and Fannie Beasley, long-time residents in that building. Their roots ran deep on Republic Street. I could tell because everyone lifted a hand to wave at them, and call out their names, Willie and Fannie. You'd see them often on the steps at the entrance.

Georgia Keith, another long time Republic Street resident said, "Willie always looked sharp. There wasn't a crease in his pants because Fannie kept them ironed." Willie would get up early in the mornings, way before anyone else ventured out into the streets. He would be out there sweeping the sidewalks on Republic Street and whistling to the rhythm of his broom. Willie's whistling would be my morning wake up call. It was a peaceful sound I learned to appreciate, for it was a daily ritual that carried a much deeper meaning over time. They had a presence on the street that was palpable. Willie and Fannie were a pair of old-timers, and I mean that with the deepest sense of respect. They made you want to live on that street because you wanted to be connected to its strong roots, which came from the people who made it home. They loved their home, this building, this place on Republic Street where they befriended neighbors.

They even had a room, some called a "juke joint", where camaraderie was experienced through playing cards, conversation, listening to old-time music and sipping down a cold drink on a hot day.

I miss Willie and Fannie. They were not people expressing lots of words; it was their daily presence and how they cared for the life on this street that made them so special. It seems fitting that we call 1405-07 Republic Street *The Beasley Place*. It's a small sign of our gratitude for their significant contribution making Republic Street a welcoming street and Over-the-Rhine a welcoming neighborhood to all who ventured down its path.

With Gratitude for Willie and Fannie,
Bonnie Neumeier
a neighbor and OTRCH Board member



REFLECTIONS OF REPUBLIC STREET RESIDENTS

Milton and Georgia Keith have lived in Over-the-Rhine for 50 years, the last 20 of them on Republic Street. In the late 90s Milton and neighbor, Mary Johnson, began the Republic Street

Block Club. Originally the club worked with neighbors to keep the street clean of litter and weeds. Later, larger projects evolved.



Great American Clean-Up 2005



Great American Clean-Up 2006

With the help of Keep Cincinnati Beautiful, the park on the 1400 block was cleaned up

and equipped, and trees were planted along the sidewalk. The club continued its work for about ten years, but ceased activity when construction in the area, especially on Vine Street, made keeping the street neat and clean no longer possible.

The last few years haven't always been easy for the Keiths on Republic Street. Construction continues to be a problem, as does parking (non-residents use the street to park when visiting Vine Street). Some of the activities in the park have remained a problem. While many people living on or visiting Vine Street are polite when passing



Continued on page 4

REFLECTIONS OF REPUBLIC STREET RESIDENTS

(CONTINUED)



though Republic Street, they all aren't, which is very irritating.

However, with the opening of Beasley Place, Milton and Georgia are optimistic. The new residents, some of whom will be families with children, will add diversity to life on the street, and bring new

energy. It may be time to get the Republic Street Block Club going again.

Georgia recently retired as School Community Resource Coordinator at Rothenberg Elementary. She serves as the vice-president of the OTRCH board of trustees

Milton was a supervisor at Queen City Barrel, and now works for OTRCH at Recovery Hotel

Eric and Mindy Hammer moved to Cincinnati in 1996. Eric and Mindy describe their experience of connecting to Over-the-Rhine almost 20 years ago with the following reflection.

"Eric worked at Cincinnati Public Radio and drove through Over-the-Rhine every day admiring the architecture and liveliness of the neighborhood. Living in the suburbs was fine, but we felt like we missed the city life. Even before our youngest went off to college, we prepared our children for the fact that we weren't going to sit around an empty nest."

"By moving to Over-the-Rhine we'll have an opportunity to immerse ourselves in the parks, museums, theater, restaurants, and wonderful diversity of people. We love the eclectic mix of new and trendy like the Salazar restaurant and long-time community institutions like the Alabama Fish Bar and Findlay Market."

"We know we'll love our new community. We never met the Beasleys, but after meeting Georgia and Milton Keith and Pat Maxwell, we feel like we're discovering the spirit of the community

that the Beasleys represent. We look forward to adding our energy and enthusiasm to this remarkable historic neighborhood."

Mindy works at the Freestore/Foodbank

Eric is a high school teacher at Glen Este High School

Ellen Varner moved with her daughter Elizabeth (now Shockley) from Atlanta to Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood in 1966. They came to be near Ellen's mother, and have lived here ever since. Since 1996 they have been residents of ReSTOC (Race Street Tenant Organization Cooperative) and OTRCH housing. For the past nine years, they have lived on Republic Street, in an apartment renovated by volunteers from Moeller High School. Beasley Place is across the street from their apartment.



The Over-the-Rhine that they knew almost 50 years ago was a place where there were lots of churches, big families, and everybody knew everybody. Now, it is different. The population of OTR is half what it was twenty years ago, many of the churches struggle or have closed, and there are lots of new residents. Ellen and Liz are glad to see new people in the neighborhood, especially young families with children. On a warm day, sitting on the front stoop, everybody that walks by says hello, or stops to talk.

Republic Street is a lovely, tree-lined street with friendly people, in many ways, as it was when Willie and Fannie Beasley lived there. There are some problems; parking in Over-the-Rhine remains a contentious and unsolved issue and the park on Republic is not always used for positive purposes, but Ellen and Liz are glad to live on the street, and look forward to new neighbors.

One suggestion they made was to create a Welcome Committee on the street. With 13 new households in Beasley Place, the committee would be busy.

THE RENOVATED BEASLEY PLACE

Beasley Place is owned, is being developed by, and will be managed by Over-the-Rhine Community Housing. HGC Construction is the general contractor for the project and CR Architects is the architecture firm.

First Financial Bank is serving as the equity provider, and is providing the construction and permanent loan.

Funds for the project come from state and federal historic tax credits, City of Cincinnati HOME funding, Housing Development Gap Financing funding from the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA), City of Cincinnati Lead Education and Remediation (CLEAR) funding, and a grant from Robert H. Reakirt Foundation.

When finished, the historic, 23,000 square feet, five-story building will have thirteen affordable units and approximately 1,290 square feet of street-level commercial space:

- Ten of the units will be for very-low income (50% of Hamilton County's median annual income) individuals or families; \$34,250 for a family of four, \$24,000 for an individual.



March, 85% Ready



BP Renovation Interior

- Three of the units will be for extremely low-income (30% of Hamilton County's median annual income) individuals or families; \$20,550 for a family of four, \$14,400 for an individual.
- The unit composition is: (6) one-bedroom units, (4) two-bedrooms, and (3) three-bedrooms.
- An elevator and on-site laundry is provided.
- Rent, including utilities ranges from \$360 to \$865

Applications are being accepted. Section 8 vouchers are helpful.

OTRCH SUPPORTING RESIDENTS

Barriers to maintaining housing, job stability, and quality of life can look like small bumps in the road, large hurdles to be scaled and climbed over, and everything in between. The stories of Omar and Tawnya show us two examples.

At sixteen, “Omar” was applying for his first paid job, a teen camp counselor at the YMCA’s Camp Ernst in Burlington, KY. As part of his application, he had to set up a savings account and obtain his first picture ID, two steps that he admitted were initially overwhelming. A long-time participant at Children’s Creative Corner, Omar reached out to staff for help.

Getting a state issued, non-driving ID costs \$8. Opening a savings account at the local credit union requires the ID, and a minimum of \$5. As a teenager who works hard in school, maintains a 3.0 GPA, plays on four sports teams, and helps care for his five younger siblings when his mother is working, the \$13 was a big hurdle. With the help of the Resident Services Emergency Need Fund (RSENF), initiated by the

Franciscans with additional support of OTRCH donors, he got the ID, set up the account, finished the application, focused on his interview, and got the job.

Several streets over, Tawnya was facing her large barrier, keeping the utilities on in her three-bedroom apartment. Her bill had accrued to \$1,100, and had received a disconnect notice. Though she had been making partial monthly back payments, with her fixed income it was difficult to keep up with the high, variable bills and continue to provide for her four children.

As the weather got colder, Tawnya reached out to the Resident Services department. RSENF funds were used to pay the bill, which allowed her to enroll in a long-term utility assistance payment program, PIPP (Percentage of Income Payment Plan). As she entered the winter months, her utility bill was fixed at an amount that is affordable, assuring that she could pay all her bills and provide the care for her children that she wants and needs to provide.

NEW HOMELESS INITIATIVE A SOLUTION TO LONG-TERM HOMELESSNESS

On January 1 OTRCH renewed its partnership with Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services (GCBHS) to reach, house, and provide services to chronically homeless individuals. GCBHS was one of five agencies in Ohio awarded new federal funding to house chronic homeless individuals who experience severe mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders. This new program will move 170 long-term homeless individuals into permanent housing over a 3-year period. OTRCH, one of four GCBHS partners in the project, will provide housing for 10 of the anticipated 170 individuals. GCBHS will provide intensive services to help the homeless maintain and thrive in housing. This new effort places more emphasis on providing high-intensive services in the first nine months of engaging with and housing project participants.

While this program is new funding, it is not a new initiative. For the past five years, OTRCH has partnered with GCBHS in the Paths to Recovery program. P2R has housed over 100 of our community’s longest-term homeless men and women utilizing the Housing First (housing with no preconditions) model. Some

of these individuals are housed at the Jimmy Heath House, others are in scattered site apartments in neighborhoods other than Over-the-Rhine. P2R has been extremely successful at reducing chronic homelessness, as well as reducing the community’s medical, policing, and incarceration costs related to caring for individuals without housing.

The Paths to Recovery project here in Cincinnati was one of a few federally-funded test sites of the Housing First model. Our experience here, coupled with other successful projects, has proven the value of providing housing first as the key to reducing chronic homelessness. It has proven so successful that the federal government has endorsed the Housing First model and is encouraging an expanded implementation of it in all communities.

OTRCH is pleased to partner with GCBHS to further reduce the chronic homeless population in our community, and work towards the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s goal of eliminating chronic homelessness altogether.

—Andy Hutzel

MOVING FROM CAMP TO HOUSING

Many people had written Doug off. Police officers, homeless outreach workers, and church groups had tried to convince him to leave his homeless camp in exchange for safe, affordable housing. Doug, a native Cincinnati, lived on the streets of Cincinnati and Covington for 15 years. The last eight years, he lived in a large camp he built behind a food distributor in Queensgate.

Doug prided himself on being a survivalist and enjoyed the freedom to do as he wanted saying, “I was prepared to die in that camp.” He didn’t have or want food stamps, or medical care. He would accept help from church groups, the occasional skid of unused food from one of the nearby food distributors, and occasionally from restaurants in the area. He used to work in construction, and those skills were handy in building and maintaining his camp. The police, except for an occasional arrest, left him alone, and a couple of the officers gained Doug’s respect and appreciation.

During his time in Queensgate, Doug was visited by a number of homeless outreach workers, but resisted their invitation to housing and services. One of these outreach workers was Holli Thiam. She was directed to visit Doug, which she did regularly, and occasionally. Doug recalled, “I loved Holli, but told her no thanks.” Holli persisted for almost three years, until her unexpected death in 2013.

Her death was devastating to everyone in the Paths to Recovery community, including Doug, who attended Holli’s memorial service at the Jimmy Heath House. He always appreciated how hard she had fought to convince him to give up the camp and move into housing. It was at that service that Doug told the other Paths to Recovery staff that “I’ll go into housing.” In August 2013, after 15 years living on the streets, Doug signed a lease on an OTRCH apartment, and received his own set of keys.

The transition wasn’t easy. Though he had an apartment, he didn’t stay there for over two months, using it only to shower and clean up. As the weather got colder, he would periodically spend a night in the apartment. One day, he decided to pack up and move his things in for good. It helped that two of his long-time friends at the camp also had an OTRCH apartment nearby.

Today, Doug’s camp has been dismantled and the wooded area has been cleared. A couple of weeks ago, I asked him if he missed any part of his old life. He paused and said that he misses not using his survival skills the way he used to. After a year and a half, Doug is doing well. He reports, “I’m in bed by 10 and up at 4:30 with coffee and the news.” He now has food stamps, is receiving medical care, and ongoing case management. He spends time with friends, and enjoys art and cooking. Instead of rabbit stew at the camp, he enjoys making deviled eggs and pork chops. Doug has utilized some of his building skills painting his apartment to truly make it his home.

—Andy Hutzel





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HOW TO SUPPORT OVER-THE-RHINE COMMUNITY HOUSING

There are many ways to support OTRCH and our work on behalf of low-income residents of Over-the-Rhine.

Donate!

All of the following information and “hot” links are available on the OTRCH website, www.otrch.org. Click the Support Us! tab on the homepage.

- Make a one-time, or monthly, gift online via the secure form.
- Make a gift by check: Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, 114 W. 14th Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202
- Make a gift, online or by mail, to memorialize a person or to honor a person(s) at special times (holidays, birthdays, weddings).
- Have fun and be a fundraiser for us! Call me, I’ll give you some ideas and then use Crowdrise to create your own fundraising page and campaign. You can also use Crowdfunder for alternative giving at special times.
- Remember OTRCH when you begin the Required Minimum Distribution from retirement accounts.
- Make a gift of stock, or wire funds from a cash account
- Remember OTRCH when naming beneficiaries in your life insurance, annuity, and estate documents.

Use Community Resources to Help OTRCH!

- Make OTRCH the beneficiary of your Kroger Rewards card. You can either get a Kroger Rewards card or change the beneficiary to OTRCH on your existing card.
- Make your Amazon purchases by using AmazonSmile. 0.5% of your purchase price will be donated to OTRCH.
- Use Goodsearch as your search engine. For every internet search you do, Goodsearch gives a penny to OTRCH. Check out other ways that Goodsearch provides to support OTRCH.



Be Informed!

- Receive email updates.
- Like us on Facebook

Be Engaged!

Invite a church, school, business, or friends group to join you in a volunteer project in Over-the-Rhine. Contact Jake Merritt (jmerritt@otrch.org) for information. If you don’t have a group, Jake can help you find one.

