

Press for
Project 1013



Nonprofit taking matters into own hands — razing 10 vacant westside homes

March 28, 2014 Rockford Register Star

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Rockford volunteers work hard to 'Save Blaisdell Street'

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Poor Town: For Rockford couple, living in District 11 is a calling

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Church lends hand to Rockford neighborhood

July 17, 2013 The Rock River Times

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By [Kevin Haas](#)

Rockford Register Star

March 28, 2014 11:46AM

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Nonprofit taking matters into own hands — razing 10 vacant westside homes

ROCKFORD — No one is supposed to live inside the yellow two-story home at the corner of Miriam Avenue and Andrews Street.

But that doesn't mean no one does.

Empty liquor bottles are discarded on the front lawn. The front door of the condemned home is busted wide open, giving view of empty bottles, a broken porcelain commode and other trash scattered across a beaten hardwood floor.

People who live in the west-side neighborhood say squatters often occupy the home until police kick them out.

"Last year, there were 350 tires in that garage and the door was not suitable. It could have fallen on anybody," said James DeVoe, president of the [West Gateway Coalition](#).

The big yellow house is one of 10 to be torn down this spring by a newly formed nonprofit organization that collaborated with the city to raze the condemned homes at no charge. The homes will be razed by Rockford Corridor Improvement Inc., which incorporated as a nonprofit on Jan. 31, according to [Illinois Secretary of State](#) records.

The registered agent is John Holmstrom of [William Charles](#).

"It will help keep some of the neighborhood problems down," said Lerashio Green, who lives near the home.

Green suspects a squatter was responsible for break-ins in the neighborhood. He keeps a watch for problems through security cameras installed on his property.

Each of the soon-to-be razed homes are in the neighborhood around Ellis and Lewis Lemon elementary schools.

"When these students are walking to and from school, it's hard to be inspired that you can be something great when you're walking through neighborhoods that have been just decimated by the housing crisis," said Ald. Tom McNamara, D-3.

City Council members on Monday approved the development agreement that allows for demolition. It's expected that many structures will require asbestos abatement before demolition can begin.

The agreement calls for the homes to be razed no later than May 23.

The nonprofit group's demolition work will be in addition to the 80 to 100 homes the city plans to tear down this year.

"I applaud (the group) for being so proactive and so willing to do this," McNamara said. "Their investment into this will really make a tremendous impact on those neighborhoods."

DeVoe and his organization, a collaboration of neighborhoods working to improve the city's west side, hope to take advantage of the momentum from the demolitions. He hopes to see the empty lots left behind used in a positive way, be that as community gardens, parks or a plot for [Habitat for Humanity](#) to build a new home.

Groups of volunteers, including DeVoe, have dedicated many hours to do everything from cleaning up backyards and alleys to making minor repairs to homes and other beautification in the area, particularly along Blaisdell Street. Project 10:13, also known as [Saving Blaisdell Street](#), is in its fourth year of all-volunteer work to improve the area.

DeVoe said residents also must continue to report problem properties to police and code enforcement officials.

"We are cleaning up our neighborhoods," DeVoe said. "We, the residents, are changing our neighborhood. We're getting rid of these old homes. We're making our landlords accountable. We're making homeowners that vacate their homes accountable, and we're holding the city accountable for getting them down."

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PHOTO/ KEVIN HAAS/RRSTAR.COM

The view through an open door of an abandoned home in the 2000 block of Andrews Street on Wednesday, March 26, 2014.

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By [Brian Leaf](#)

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June 28, 2013 12:01AM

Rockford volunteers work hard to 'Save Blaisdell Street'

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For four days volunteers with [Project 10:13](#), also known as Saving Blaisdell Street, fought rain, heat, poison ivy and fear of snakes as they chopped, cut, raked and painted their way up and down five blocks of Rockford's poorest neighborhood.

“It's fun to be with other people and show them God's love,” said Martina Berger, 14, who was one of 65 volunteers from church and community groups at work Thursday.

This is the third year that neighborhood resident James Devoe has spearheaded mission work along Blaisdell. Members from Devoe's house of worship, [Rock Church](#), 6732 Harrison Ave., were joined by neighborhood residents, the West Gate Coalition neighborhood watch group, the Rockford Housing Authority, New Zion Baptist Church and Lighthouse Christian Church from Fond du Lac, Wis.

Project 10:13 is a reference to the verse from the Gospel of Matthew: “If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it. If it is not, let your peace return to you.”

“We come in here and we're cleaning up the neighborhood, cleaning up the alleys, helping neighborhood residents with their homes, trying to beautify the place,” Devoe said.

This year the group discovered a rogue dump of 70 tires in a backyard near the alley. Devoe said the tires will be recycled when they are removed.

More than half of residents in the neighborhood – bounded on the north by Auburn Street, the south by West State Street, North Johnston Avenue on the west and North Avon, Blaisdell and Furman streets on the east – had incomes below federal poverty guidelines, according to data from [ourvitalsigns.org](#).

Per capita income in the neighborhood in 2010 averaged \$8,968, compared with \$24,331 for Winnebago and Boone counties.

Devoe said he hopes improvements this week on Blaisdell between Central and Avon streets will affect people living in the neighborhood.

“We want to bring some pride and hope back,” he said.

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PHOTO/ MAX GERSH | RRSTAR.COM

Emma Katke, 11, stains the railing of a home in the 1300 block of Blaisdell Street Thursday, June 27, 2013, as part of Project 1013 in Rockford.

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March 17, 2013 12:01AM

Poor Town: For Rockford couple, living in District 11 is a calling

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ROCKFORD — They can afford to move from their house on Mulberry Street, but James and Zandra Devoe are staying put.

For them, Rockford's poorest neighborhood is more than a place to live. It's a ministry.

"It's my firm belief that God placed my wife and me in this neighborhood," said Devoe, 64, who moved to Rockford's west side 33 years ago.

Devoe is president of West Gateway Coalition, a neighborhood group formed when the Ellis Heights Weed and Seed program ended in 2011. The federally funded anti-crime program aimed to weed out bad people and seed the neighborhood with opportunities.

Devoe retired in 2006 from a job and a commute to Newell Rubbermaid in Freeport. That's the year he started a community garden at Banner of Truth International, 1401 W. State St. In 2008, the garden became a place for juvenile offenders to do community service, meet mentors and learn how to build garden boxes.

"A lot of them have a lack of knowledge and skills," he said. "They can't use simple tools like screwdrivers and tape measures."

In 2008, Devoe went to work for Anderson-Breaccon, formerly Anderson Packaging. When shift work forced him to curtail work with the youth group at Rock Church, 6732 Harrison Ave., he organized a mission trip for the group. For the past three years, kids from Rock Church have come to the west side to work in the Ellis Heights neighborhood.

While there was never fear about mission work in Guatemala or Honduras, there was initial trepidation among some people about working here.

"There's just as much violence down there, if not more, than there is in Rockford," Devoe said.

This June they'll target Blaisdell Street from Central Avenue to Avon Street, a project known as 10:13. It's a reference to the verse from the Gospel of Matthew: "If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it. If it is not, let your peace return to you."

Devoe said they'll work on curb-appeal projects — painting, porch repairs and other carpentry work — and clean up alleys behind houses where drug dealers and gangs hang out.

He sees such projects as a way to build momentum for change in the neighborhood.

"I think there's a chance to turn (District 11) around, as long as there is hope," he said.

"When you lose your hope, you lose your power."

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PHOTO/ AMY J. CORRENTI | RRSTAR.COM

Rockford police Sgt. Carla Redd and James Devoe talk about geopolicing during a West Gateway Coalition meeting Wednesday, Feb. 20, 2013. Devoe is president of the neighborhood group.

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ROCKFORD NEWS

Church lends hand to west Rockford neighborhood

Goal is to 'bring peace to a place of great need'

By Audrey Carpenter
Staff Writer

It started three years ago when a member of Rock Church's congregation came to the leadership of the church and asked if the church could help in a clean-up of his neighborhood.

Federal Weed and Seed program dollars were being distributed during that time throughout Rockford. The funds are given to help clean up, plant and seed neighborhood areas in need of beautification. But the area that was in need the most was just outside the federal government's designated district for funding, and as a result, they could not

receive funds for a beautification project. The area, about six blocks of Blaisdell Street in District 11 in west Rockford, is one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. Jim DeVoe, resident of the Ellis Heights neighborhood and president of the West Gateway Coalition, was the one who approached the church.

Several homes in the six-block stretch are abandoned. Alleys were overgrown and had mounds of bulk garbage in them, such as tires. Trees and shrubs needed trimming, sidewalks were covered with dirt and weeds, trash was abundant, and grass needed

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Photo provided

For the third straight year, members of Rock Church participated in "Project 1013," helping to clean up 80 homes and three alleyways from Avon Street to Central Avenue in late June. Rock Church Assistant Pastor Jared Katke said: "It's called Project 1013 because we believe in Matthew 10:13 in the Bible, which says: 'If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you.' Our goal is to bring peace to a place of great need."

Church lends hand to west Rockford ...

► Continued from page A1 cutting. Most importantly, people had lost pride in home ownership.

"Residents told us, if we could have a line of sight down our street we would feel safer," Rock Church Assistant Pastor Jared Katke said. "Through this, we've helped neighbors get to know neighbors again."

The church started the mission primarily as a youth group project. Each year, the project, called "Project 1013," has grown. In late June, the church was at the neighborhood for the third consecutive year, and had an average of 70 people a day helping for four days straight from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Some congregants even took a personal holiday off work to volunteer.

This year, they helped 80 homes and cleaned up three alleyways from Avon Street to Central Avenue.

"We were particularly pleased with how the alleys turned out, because when we started, you couldn't even drive down them," Katke said. There was also a particular house he personally made a commitment to get cleaned up because it had dozens of abandoned tires in the front yard. He made the city aware of the problem, and now the yard is free of the tires.

The city supplied three trash bins and hauled away 15 loads of trash, Katke said. From the brush and tree removal, the city was able to recycle that into mulch.

"It's called Project 1013 because we believe in Matthew 10:13 in the Bible, which says: 'If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you,'" Katke said. "Our goal is to bring peace to a place of great need."

Asked if the church would branch out and clean up other areas of the city in the future, Katke said for right now, the church's goal is to continue working the Blaisdell area. They are discussing going back in the fall for a "maintenance day" of clean-up, he said.

The church opened each day of clean-up with prayer and breakfast. Then, it was



Photo provided

Rock Church Assistant Pastor Jared Katke said: "We are there to clean, yes, but it's also important to put down your rake or broom and have conversation with the residents who live there. Our goal is to support, encourage, help and uplift. We know people there by name now. Pride has come back into the community."

down to business. Along the way, owners and tenants came out and spoke to the volunteers and helped in the clean-up.

"We are there to clean, yes, but it's also important to put down your rake or broom and have conversation with the residents who live there," Katke said. "Our goal is to support, encourage, help and uplift. We know people there by name now. Pride has come back into the community."

There was a barbecue and ice cream social sponsored by Rockford Housing Authority at the end of the project, and about 30 "baskets

of blessings" were handed out to residents, filled with household items, hygiene products and homemade items.

A youth group from Wisconsin came and helped this year, and even those individuals working off community service requirements helped. "I was touched to see a young man who had fulfilled his community service requirement come back and continue helping, even when he had fulfilled the hours he needed," Katke said.

Rock Church is at 6732 Harrison Ave., Rockford, and can be reached at (815) 229-7600.