

# THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908



## NEIGHBORHOOD FOCUS South Wedge

BY COLLEEN M. FARRELL

When Peter Monacelli moved to Rochester's South Wedge, he and his wife, Gloria, thought maybe they'd live there a few years. That was more than 30 years ago.

"It was a high crime area at the time," Monacelli said. "It was really kind of falling apart. It was probably bottomed out by then."

Burned out and abandoned buildings were the norm. So were absentee landlords. Monacelli, a carpenter, and other neighbors started fixing up properties, turning them back into single-family homes instead of chopped up apartments, and selling them. The crime rate went down and neighbors started looking out for each other, he said.

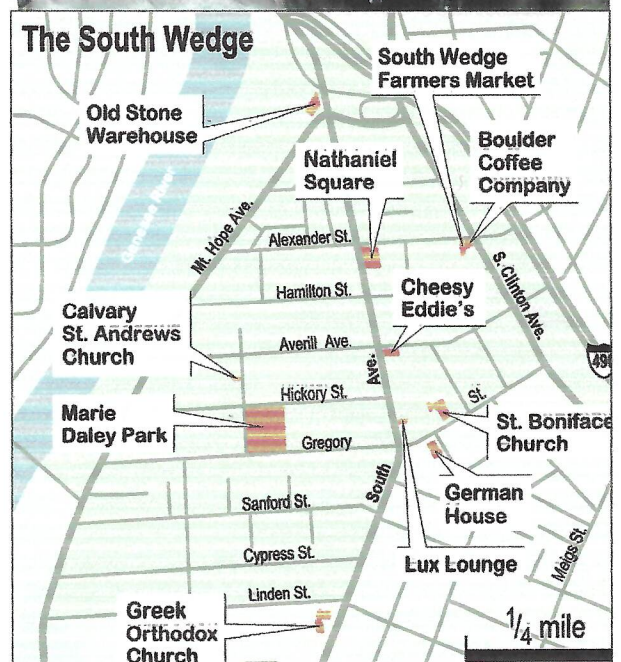
"What happened is that, once people owned the houses, it changed how everybody viewed it and it really had a posi-

tive effect on the neighborhood," he said.

Home to about 4,000 residents today, the triangular-shaped neighborhood remained undeveloped until the Erie Canal was built in the 1800s because it was remote and hard to get to, Gregory Street resident Rose O'Keefe said.

"Once the canal came in, the thing that gave the South Wedge its flavor is that there were no zoning laws so everything was built here," she said.

In the 1970s, the neighborhood suffered the effects of urban flight. At that time, about 200 struc-



From top left: South Avenue facing downtown Rochester; A sculpture of Col. Nathaniel Rochester; map by Lawrence Seil; photo illustration by Dawn DeHollander; photos by Vasily Baziuk.

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tures were vacant, according to Robert Boyd, executive director of the South Wedge Planning Committee Inc. (SWPC).

"Now a house goes on the market and it generally sells within 10 days, so there's a very strong market in the Wedge," he said.

Part of the reason is the area's mixed housing stock, Boyd said. There's Italianite, Greek Revival and American four-square style; mansions and cottages share space with bungalows and barns. Homes typically sell from \$50,000 to \$150,000, he said.

"The South Wedge neighborhood is truly an eclectic diverse neighborhood, both socially, economically and in every other sense of the word," Boyd said. "It's very, very diverse. It's almost an urban village, if you will."

One need not walk more than a mile to find bars, coffee shops, eateries, a Realtor, a bank, a farmer's market, someone to replace windows and a hardware store.

Monacelli and his wife eventually left their South Avenue apartment for an Ashland Street home. Their kitchen was built in 1837 and other rooms were tacked on as needed. Their neighbors now include musicians, cabinet makers, electricians, painters and teachers.

The diversity in income levels and ethnic backgrounds is strong, Monacelli said.

"The thing that we [neighbors] have in common is that we love the Wedge, and I think that it's a good place for us to be," Monacelli said. "I think that makes the difference; when we get here want to be part of it. We want to do things. We want to be in it together."

Recently, Monacelli and his wife were walking through the South Wedge when they saw a young teen hurt. They called 911 and the operator told the couple three other people had just called.

"That's the kind of neighborhood we live in," Monacelli said.

In 1976, O'Keefe and her husband,



David Halter of Rochester enjoys his cup of coffee and the morning's newspaper at the Coffee Connection coffee shop on South Avenue. He is a member of the South Wedge Planning Committee and says he has seen the neighborhood improve a great deal through the last 20 years.

VASILY BAZUK



The Adolf Spiehler House is an old residence on Averill Avenue.

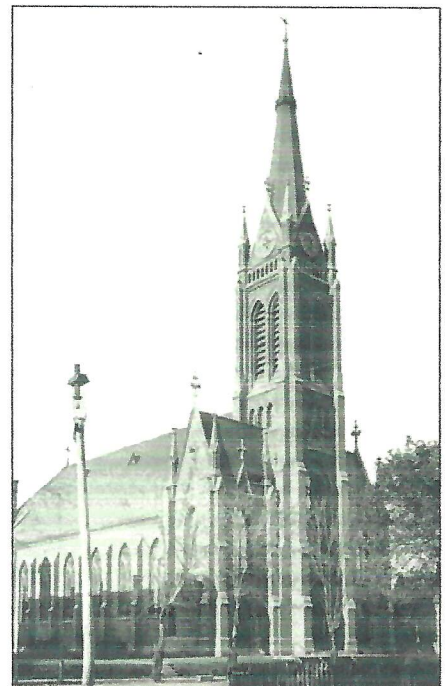
Bob Meadows, bought their first home on Gregory Street. The area was at rock bottom then, she said, and the couple "didn't know what we were getting into."

Their circa-1860s structure had tiny bathrooms and bedrooms and was falling apart, but eventually they fixed it up.

"Our first house had nothing level or square, but it was a good little house," O'Keefe said. "It had a character to it that is just wonderful."

A few years later, they decided it was time to move, and they did — four doors down.

O'Keefe had fallen in love with the neighborhood and its history. She even wrote a book on it and wrote articles for "The Wedge," the neighborhood's newspaper. She and her husband are now planning an open house for the 168



St. Boniface Church, on Gregory Street, was built in the late 1800s. A new church was built in 1960 to replace the one destroyed by fire in 1957.

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOS USED COURTESY ROCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

households on Gregory Street.

"It's a place where a lot of amazing things happened," she said.

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Those amazing things, several residents said, are attributed to the SWPC. The neighborhood's turnaround started when City Hall approached businesses and community leaders about what should, and could, be done and the the SWPC grew out of those efforts. The group has recruited new businesses through the years, and its South Avenue business district now is home to a wine bar, coffee shops, restaurants, taverns and other small businesses. The group recently helped to build a playground in Marie Daley Park. And a statue of Nathaniel Rochester, the man who founded what would become the Flour City, was installed at the corner of South Avenue and Alexander Street.

SWPC has helped more than 60 homeowners receive loans and grants for repairs and offers the assistance of an economic advisor for budding entrepreneurs.

"We have worked on making sure there is a mix of housing stock, that there's a sustainable business district and that the community is engaged," Boyd said.

Now, plans are in the works for River Park Commons on Mount Hope Avenue,



VASILY BAZUK

A sculpture of Col. Nathaniel Rochester, "Reflecting," at Nathaniel Square, dedicated in his honor May 17, corner of Alexander Street and South Avenue.

a mix of affordable and market-rate housing. Konar Properties already has developed some South Avenue parcels and is discussing the addition of housing near Gregory Street. Flower City Management has talked about redeveloping the former Downtown Motor Lodge near South and South Clinton avenues into a mixed-use project.

"I think the secret is having a clear vision of what you want, making sure the community is engaged, that you engage

business owners and that you try to keep all three legs of that stool going," Boyd said. "Because if you don't, it's going to fall apart."

As far as Monacelli is concerned, living anywhere else is unimaginable.

"It's been just a great life here. It's really turned into quite a nice neighborhood," he said. "I'm going to die here. I've made up my mind. I'm not moving."

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