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▲ PUBLISHED BY THE SOUTH WEDGE PLANNING COMMITTEE, A GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION SERVING THE SOUTH WEDGE ▲

# Susan John Delivers for South Clinton Ave.

by Dan Buyer

Senator Hillary Clinton joined local community, City and State leaders to announce a \$750,000 state grant to make improvements on South Clinton Avenue. Accompanied by NYS Assemblymember Susan John, she also toured South Avenue and visited several businesses as part of this announcement.

Assemblymember John obtained the money through the State's Multi-Modal fund. The City of Rochester will use the funds to improve intersections throughout the corridor by installing curb extensions at many of the corners to improve pedestrian safety and better define on-street parking.

Construction is expected to

start sometime in 2008. These improvements were among those called for in the recently completed South Clinton Avenue Plan, put together by neighborhood and business leaders and the Rochester Regional Community Design Center as part of ESCAPE (Evolving South Clinton Avenue Places & Environment Committee). Earlier this year, SWPC obtained an additional \$200,000 for façade and building restoration grants and streetscape enhancements for South Clinton.

Similar improvements completed by the City, SWPC and the Business Association of the South Wedge Area on South Avenue in 2005 and 2006 resulted in millions of dollars in private

development. Assemblymember John obtained \$400,000 in state funds for South Avenue in 2002, resulting in new curb bump outs and crosswalks and the construction of Nathaniel Square. John said she looks forward to watching the revitalization of South Clinton.

"South Clinton Avenue is a vital link for our community," John said. "And these changes will now create another village within our city."

Thanks and congratulations go to members of ESCAPE, which includes representation from the South Clinton Merchants Association, the Swillburg Neighborhood Association, the Ellwanger & Barry Neighborhood Association, City NET, Planning and Engineering staff, SWPC and SEAC. Special thanks go to Maureen Murphy and Kathy Betlem, who lead the committee.

Mayor Robert Duffy was also on hand for the announcement, and commended the level of cooperation that led to this project.

"This funding will help improve public safety and economic development along South Clinton Avenue," said the Mayor. "I want to thank Assemblymember Susan John, who delivered the funds to realize this long-anticipated project. I also want to thank the ESCAPE Committee for their hard work and advocacy. The collaborative spirit embodied here is the essence of my vision for our great city." ▲



Senator Hillary Clinton, Assemblymember Susan John and Mayor Robert Duffy share the stage to announce a \$750,000 State grant for South Clinton Street improvements. Congratulations to Maureen Murphy, Kathy Betlem, Helen Hogan, Dan Buyer, Eileen Thomas, Mike Thompson, Paul Way, Pete Saxe, Dave Halter, Matt Perdue, Michelle Rook and all those who have participated on the ESCAPE Committee. (Photo: Eileen Thomas)

## CONGRATULATIONS COFFEE CONNECTION



The new Coffee Connection and the South Wedge Green Grocer and Garden Center celebrated their openings at 781 South Ave. on Oct. 21<sup>st</sup>. The building was recently restored by Konar Properties. Shown here, Les Arpeggios entertains customers at the Coffee Connection. Special thanks go to the SUNY Geneseo Small Business Development Center and the City of Rochester. (Photo: Michelle Rook)

## Businesses Compete for Decorating Prizes

Break out the bells, balls and baubles and add a little holiday cheer to the neighborhood as BASWA (Business Association of the South Wedge Area) sends out scouts for its annual holiday decoration contest. Area shops who trim their facades are eligible to win cash prizes from \$100-\$300. Prizes will be awarded after judging on Dec. 16-17. See [www.baswa.org](http://www.baswa.org) for more info. ▲

The Business Association of the South Wedge Area (BASWA) presents

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\*20% of all ticket sales will be donated to St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center, which provides health care, mental health counseling, adult ed and social service advocacy.

## Thank You, Citizens

Citizens Bank has donated \$10,000 to the South Wedge Planning Committee to support small business and economic development efforts in the South Wedge area.

The funds will help SWPC and SUNY Geneseo provide business plan counseling, loan packaging and other services to existing and potential new businesses. Over the past seven years, SWPC and SUNY Geneseo have provided one-on-one business plan counseling to more than 300 entrepreneurs and assisted many of them with getting financed. This has resulted in more than 30 new businesses.

In 2005, Citizens also donated funds for the construction of Nathaniel Square. For more information, contact Eileen Thomas at 256-1740, ext. 106. ▲

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## WEDGE PROFILE

## Yvonne Williams

By Rose O'Keefe

Three years ago, **Yvonne Williams** was laid low by heart failure and asthma, and after she pulled through, she considered she had her second chance.

Gradually, she started helping JoAnn Thomas, then River Park Tenants Association president, and got the feel for the Tenants Association. She became its vice president, serving with, JoAnn and was elected Association president in April 2005.

Together with Betty Wynn and Lynette Williams, and with support from SWPC's Dan Buyer, they collected computers and created the Resource Room in the high rise apartment building. Today they act as resource coordinators, assist with tenant activities and serve on the hospitality committee. Now, anyone with vision problems can get rides to appointments. They refer neighbors in

need to St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center or Calvary St. Andrew's Parish.

"That's why we are so successful," said Yvonne. "It's not a business; it's a service. We've got a big responsibility. Management appreciates us."

For all their efforts for the community, Yvonne, JoAnn and Annie Gedeon were treated to an appreciation lunch at River Park in April.

Yvonne was raised in Buffalo, where she attended Fosdick Masten vocational school, studying cosmetology. She completed high school in Bradenton, Florida, where she picked tomatoes and oranges before returning to Buffalo.

Yvonne, a certified nursing assistant, moved to a townhouse at River Park in 1994 and to the high rise in 1998. She married in 1983 and has two daughters, Talea Lee and Reatha Lee. Yvonne is also the proud grandmother of Timonny Piatt, Quameire Brown, and QuanNasia Wallington, QuanNah Lari Bostick, and awaiting another grandbaby in May. ▲

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The WEDGE, a newspaper with a circulation of 7,000, is published six times a year and is a cooperative effort of the South Wedge Planning Committee and South Wedge residents. This organization, its members and staff make every attempt to provide accurate coverage of neighborhood news as well as local, state and national news that affects the neighborhood. Articles in this paper do not necessarily reflect the view and/or opinions of the above mentioned organization, its staff or its members. Please send any story suggestions, news releases, etc. to: WEDGE Newspaper, 224 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620.

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by Mike Fleche

The original title of this column was "Wedge People." When the column expanded to stories beyond the South Wedge, it was renamed "In & Around the Wedge."

But that name never seemed expressive enough to me. It left out the "people" part. I wanted to celebrate the contributions of all kinds of people: from the lowly to the powerful, from the very old to the very young.

After considering long lists of possibilities, I finally settled on "Heart of the City" (I'm grateful to Jason Becker for suggesting the idea—see below.) It denotes a geographical location, but it is more than that. It's about friendliness, cooperation and courage. It's an appreciation of the people who work to make our world a better place.

So here is "Heart of the City." It is my tribute to you, the rising lights and the humble heroes. I salute you.

Congratulations to **Calvary St. Andrew's Parish**, which celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary Oct. 29. The special service was conducted by Rev. **Judy Lee Hay**, its pastor since 1973. Several TV stations covered the event.

SWPC Executive Director Dan Buyer was invited to speak at the service. "Calvary St. Andrew's personifies the community spirit of the South Wedge," said Dan.

The church was formerly the joint parish of Calvary Presbyterian and St. Andrews Episcopal churches. Outreach programs by the parish spawned several vital community groups, including the South Wedge Planning Committee, of which Rev. Judy was the first director.

Last month, the busy pastor was the keynote speaker at the fall symposium of the Presbyterian Synod of the Trinity in Philadelphia.

In our last issue, I introduced **Jason** and **Jared Becker**, the twin purveyors of premium ice cream. Now several area busi-



Susan Homsey displays some of her Polish Pottery at the History Fair (Oct. 9.)  
Photo courtesy Susan Homsey.

nesses carry their **Creekview** line: Tonja's Personal Touch, 674 South Ave.; the Coffee Connection, 681 South Ave.; South Wedge Green Grocer, 683 South Ave.; and John's Tex-Mex Eatery, 489 South Ave.

"We're proud that they're carrying our products," Jason said of the new retail outlets. "We love the South Wedge because that's our home. We think it's the heart of the city."

Watch for new flavors out this month: Cranberry, Candy Cane and Eggnog.

The **History Fair**, held at the Historic German House October 9, had a tempting variety of vendors and exhibits. Between deliveries of our October issue, I stopped in and learned about everything from antique postcards to the history of *Hockey in Rochester* (by Blaise Lamphier) to Polish Pottery (imported and distributed by Susan Homsey).

The designs, all in signature cobalt blue, are variations of the "eyes" on peacock feathers. Originally folk artists carved their designs in frozen potatoes; today they combine stamping

and paintbrushing to decorate each piece.

"The joy is in the holding of these pieces, the old-world roundness and heft," Susan rhapsodized. "Once they warm up they retain that warmth, the mugs especially."

I enjoyed the photos in Nancy Rosin's book, *The Hands That Feed Us: 100 Years at the Rochester Public Market*. I was intrigued by the *Danny and Life on Bluff Point* books by Mary Ellen Lee, which are based on actual journals of the author's grandfather.

Some of the other exhibitors were the Canal Society of New York State, Charlotte Lighthouse, Friends of Ganondagan, and the Genesee Country Village and Museum.

Event organizer **Rose O'Keefe** was pleased with the turnout.

"The purpose of the History

Fair is to promote the South Wedge Neighborhood, promote regional history and bring all kinds of people together," she said. "And on that basis, it was generally a success."

Rose, until recently the editor of this newspaper, is the author of two pictorial books on area history, *Rochester's South Wedge* and *Southeast Rochester*, both published by Arcadia.

The banner reads "Bruised but not broken, Boulder's open." Struck by speeding cars twice in six months, **Boulder Coffee Company** at the corner of South Clinton and Alexander is being lovingly restored and remodeled.

"We're putting more light in the front," said owner **Lyjha Wilton**. "I want to flood that whole opening in glass—all glass windows, but the windows will actually be doors."

Lyjha felt frustrated when  
*continued on page 5*

Sandy Blonsky & Terri Granger's "All-Star" Team



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Edited by Chris Hartman

**Become a Cinema Theater history detective.**

Cinema owner Jo Ann Morreale and the Friends of the Cinema need your help in locating photos from the early days of the theater. They hope to establish that the façade has remained essentially unchanged for at least 50 years. Some clues to follow: first opened in 1918 as the Clinton under the ownership of George H. Caffery and George W. Evans, purchased in 1948 by Morris P. Slotnick, who started the Jo-Mor chain. For more clues, call or e-mail Barbara Case, 473-9416, [baribarb31@yahoo.com](mailto:baribarb31@yahoo.com).

**College Students Tutor Residents at River Park Commons**

Three students from Roberts Wesleyan College—Jonathan Kipfer, Daisy Algorin, and Sara Rice—tutored residents at River Park Commons in English as a Second Language as well as in Spanish.

Yvonne Williams, former Resource Room Coordinator at River Park and SWPC board member, worked with SWPC's Neighbor's Council to arrange these sessions that ran from Nov. 2 to December 7.

Plans are being made for another session in the spring. Contact SWPC for more information.

**PACTAC**

Earlier this fall, in response to a rise in street crime, residents engaged in a PACTAC BLITZ which placed trained volunteers

on the streets each day for two weeks in attempts to increase a "people presence" and reduce criminal behavior. Thanks to all those who walked! Community PACTAC walks will continue to take place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month from 6-8 p.m. starting at the S. Clinton NET Office. Everyone is welcome!

NOTE: PACTAC walkers have noticed a lack of porch lights on area streets. Please remember to turn on your porch lights after dusk to help keep our streets well lit and safe.

**Neighbor Council's Community Potluck**

Around 30 area residents gathered at Calvary St. Andrews Church for a community potluck dinner and brainstorming session. Neighbors were challenged to develop ideas and action steps regarding creative, enjoyable, and inclusive ways to build community, get neighbors together, and culturally enrich our urban village. Through both formal and informal discussions, we developed an extensive list of ideas for Neighbor Council to pursue, including more community potlucks!

For more information, con-

tact Chris Hartman: [chartman@swpc.org](mailto:chartman@swpc.org); 256-1740 x104.

**Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery**

For the first time in its 168 year history, the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery organization offered two candlelit evening tours of the north end of the cemetery in October. Regular tours are conducted at the cemetery several times every week-end from May through October, with occasional special theme tours. The tours are guided by a group of volunteers with a rich background in the history and landscape of this internationally recognized historic site. The grand finale tour this fall was illuminated by 1,000 luminaria, and some dramatic floodlighting on the landmark buildings near the north gate. For more information about the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery and its newsletter, visit [www.FOMH.org](http://www.FOMH.org).

**'Green Drinks'**

Rochester has started a chapter of Green Drinks, a national initiative to get green minded people together once a month at

an area bar to discuss issues around environmental justice. Kristin Cox and Ben Munson have spearheaded this and allowed SWPC to use the first gathering as a venue for a committee being created to work on building the South Wedge as a green neighborhood. More than a dozen residents turned out to discuss ideas of biofuels, community gardens and urban agriculture, energy conservation, composting and other initiatives that could build the South Wedge as a national model of neighborhood-based environmental stewardship and green economic development. For more information, contact Chris Hartman at [chartman@swpc.org](mailto:chartman@swpc.org); 256-1740 x104.

**South Wedge History Club**

City Historian and author Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck lecture, 6:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 15 at Episcopal Church Home, 505 Mount Hope Ave.

**Book Signing**

Local history authors Emerson Klees, Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck and Rose O'Keefe sign their books from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Sat. Dec. 9 at South Wedge Green Grocer, 683 South Ave. ▲

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## Safe Use is Ladder to Success



# "Tool Tips"

By Ed Meyers, Tool Librarian

Ten years ago I fell 14 feet in a ladder accident when the supporting structure for the ladder gave way. A 60 percent fractured spinal T12 vertebrae required six months in bed to properly mend the bone. My height was reduced half an inch from the fracture.

So here are some safety tips that may save your life or your height!

If a ladder has bad rungs, poor footing, or is rickety or improperly slanted, don't use it until these hazards are corrected. If a ladder slips or moves as you climb, it's not placed properly. When using a straight ladder, its base should be away from the supporting wall a distance equal to one quarter of its height. And, before getting on

a step ladder, see that it is fully opened and its braces locked, and never climb higher than the second step from the top.

Most important, NEVER, NEVER STAND ON THE TOP PLATFORM OF THE LADDER!

When climbing a ladder carry tools in your pocket or other tote device, but not in your hand. When working on a ladder, try at all times to keep one hand gripping the ladder. If the ladder is in a doorway, see that the door is either open or locked—then no one will bump the ladder and knock you off. Before you move a ladder, make sure you haven't left the hammer on its top. It may come sailing off.

Don't try to reach for out-of-the-way tools when on a ladder; more

*continued on page 6*

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# Tango Café Sizzles with Salsa Fever

by Nancy O'Donnell

Studio dancers José and Susan Cruzado traveled lots of dance floors before finding a home on Gregory Street. The territorial nature of the local dance community meant that sharing space wasn't often an option.

"We were lots of dancing folk, nomads traveling from studio to studio," said José. "So finally I took charge and got us together. It's really important that everyone have their own space."

Now ten instructors share the space teaching tango, lindy hop, swing, flamenco, salsa, African drumming and Afro-Brazilian dance. On weekends, dancers gather to dance typical Puerto Rican dances like *La Plena* and *Bomba*.

The Cruzados, who live in Irondequoit, decided on locating their studio in the South Wedge primarily because people were so friendly. "We met people from the South Wedge walking

through Durand Park, and they were very proud of the area," he said.

And while the diversity of the South Wedge suited them per-

fectly, it was the encouragement of established business owners that made all the difference. "When we were looking, we talked to several business owners at Animas, Houseparts, and Salon Paragon especially—and they were very kind, very receptive, very helpful."

When he's not at Tango Café teaching his signature style of Caribbean salsa, José's giving lessons at Tapas on St. Paul St. And when he's not dancing, he's working as a Monroe County Sheriff Deputy. His wife Susan has another life as a Monroe County Assistant Court Clerk. Even though the grand opening is still two months away, Tango Café dance classes are in force with patrons ages 15 to over 70. Dance sessions (beginner through advanced) run five weeks and cost \$50 for an individual and \$85 per couple

Meanwhile, refurbishing continues. January or February doors will be open for the big event. "We'll have demonstrations and free lessons and hors d'oeuvres," said José.

Tango Café, 389 Gregory Street, 271-4930, e-mail telecris@frontiernet.net. ▲



Jose and Susan Cruzado come straight from their day jobs to the ballroom at Tango Cafe. (Photo: Johannes Bockwoldt)

## Heart of the City

continued from page 3

the latest accident occurred in August, two weeks before Boulderfest. "The timing was not great for me," admitted the youthful entrepreneur.

But his native optimism quickly returns. "I try to flip it in a positive way," he said. "We're going to get a new storefront; the building will be redesigned; the inside of the store has a better layout now. And when all is said and done, Boulder has got a lot of exposure."

"When a situation's out of my control, I don't have any choice but to deal with it," he observed. "I have to take the good with the bad, roll with the punches, and keep moving forward."

"It's life," he said with a rueful smile. "It's part of life."

SWPC board chair **Robert Boyd**, a vice-president of HSBC Bank, retired November 1 after 25 years. He was honored at a retirement party at Midvale Country Club on October 25.

"Retirement is a misnomer," he said. "It's really starting a whole new phase of life."

Bob will continue to own and manage several properties in the South Wedge. He's currently developing the building at 728 South Ave. The new business, a retail wine and liquor store called **Sips & Trips**, is scheduled to open early in 2007.

"We'll have a limited selection of premium liquors and wines," says the dedicated oenophile. "We'll be doing wine-tastings and events. And we'll be doing wine trips, both locally and internationally." ▲

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## Solera Wine Bar

continued from page 7

Tuscan village called Montaione. John remembered getting up in the morning and driving down to the winery; great food, great wine."

But the couple missed friends and family. "We didn't speak the language," Katy explained. "I had my degree and wanted to come back home and get a job." John agreed. "After two years, it was

time to come back," he said.

They returned to Rochester early in 2004. John had planned to work at a winery in the Finger Lakes region, but it proved too far away to commute. While he worked as a wine specialist at Marketview Liquor in Henrietta he got the idea of opening a wine bar.

From the first, they were

drawn to the South Wedge, a city neighborhood with a lot of character. "I used to drive through this area on my way to work," John said. "I came to realize that the South Wedge was a neighborhood that had a lot of new businesses owned by young people."

Business has been a steady so far, John reported. "Our opening night was amazing. We

had 75 people in the course of the evening."

He's starting to relax and enjoy the new space. "It's a great atmosphere. It's about enjoying wine in a nice atmosphere."

**Solera Wine Bar & Lounge**, 647 South Avenue (corner of Hickory Street). Phone 232-3070. Hours: Wed.-Thurs. 5-11 p.m., Fri. 5 p.m.-12 a.m., Sat. 7 p.m.-12 a.m. On the web at [www.solera-winebar.com](http://www.solera-winebar.com). ▲

## Tool Tips

continued from page 4

people fall from a low position on the ladder than from high.

The light weight of aluminum or magnesium ladders is an asset, but lightness can also create hazards. A strong wind can blow them down and leave you stranded on the roof. And since magnesium and aluminum conduct electricity, they are risky to use around electric lines and during electrical storms. Notice that the RG&E workers use fiberglass ladders for their work.

So remember, safe use is the ladder to success. ▲

## SWPC Community Calendar

### Neighbors Council

Wednesday Dec. 6, 6 p.m.  
@ Boulder Coffee, 561 S. Clinton Ave.

### Finance Committee

Monday Dec. 11, noon  
@ 224 Mt. Hope Ave.

### NBN Sector 6

Monday Dec. 11, 5:30 p.m.  
@ 846 S. Clinton Ave.

### BASWA

Wednesday Dec. 13, 5:30 p.m.  
@ Historic House Parts, 540 South Ave.

### PCIC Meeting

Wednesday Dec. 13, 6:00 p.m.  
@ Eastside Command Center,  
(Tops Plaza, N. Clinton)

### SWPC Board of Directors

Thursday Dec. 14, 6 p.m.  
@ 224 Mt. Hope Ave.

### Marketing Team

Monday Dec. 18, noon  
@ 224 Mt. Hope Ave.

### Housing and Overlay Committee

Wednesday Dec. 20, noon  
@ 224 Mt. Hope Ave.

### Neighbors Council

Wednesday Jan. 3, 6 p.m.  
@ TBA

### Finance Committee

Monday Jan. 8, noon  
@ 224 Mt. Hope Ave.

### NBN Sector 6

Monday Jan 8, 5:30 p.m.  
@ 846 S. Clinton Ave.

### SWPC Board of Directors

Thursday Jan. 11, 6 p.m.  
@ 224 Mt. Hope Ave.

### Housing & Overlay Committee

Wednesday Jan. 17 noon  
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### Real Estate Team

Wednesday Jan 24, 6 p.m.  
@ 224 Mt. Hope Ave



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## Solera Wine Bar Brings a Touch of Paris to South Wedge

by Mike Fleche

With its rough brick walls, high ceiling, and tall windows, Solera Wine Bar and Lounge looks for all the world like a classic French bistro. You can almost hear Edith Piaf singing "La Vie en Rose."

"We wanted a cozy, unpretentious European feel," said owner John Michael Fanning. "It's casual but elegant." The new Wedge business opened October 20.

The concept of a wine bar is common in Europe, but it's just catching on in this country, John said. "It's a bar with a nice atmosphere where people can socialize and enjoy wine."

The wine list features choices from Australia, Argentina, France, Spain, Italy and Chile. Patrons can order by the bottle or by the glass.

"I'm trying to introduce one of the more unique wine selections



John Michael Fanning. Photo: Mike Fleche

in Rochester," John said, "without being esoteric or pretentious. I have the types of wines that most

people know—Chardonnay, Merlot, Pinot Grigio—and within these selections, the choices are

more interesting.

"For example, we have a fantastic, undiscovered French Chardonnay, and a Merlot from Chile. At the moment, probably the best values in the wine world are in South America."

"I'm searching out the lesser known wineries, so I can give a really good glass of wine at a good price."

Solera also offers a selection of bottled beers, and a limited selection of food items: cheeses, sliced meats, and desserts.

The path to Solera took the future entrepreneur halfway around the world. While he was living in California, John met a winemaker in the Carmel Valley. "He lived in a house on the property and walked through the vineyard to work," John recalled. "The wine was made right there on the property. I fell in love with the lifestyle."

From there he moved to Oregon, where he volunteered on weekends at Willamette Valley vineyards. "I was doing the same work as the migrant workers—picking grapes, sorting grapes," he said. "I loved it. I fell in love with it."

His girlfriend Katy, now his wife, planned to finish her archaeology degree in England. So John decided to look for work in Europe.

He e-mailed hundreds of wineries all over Europe, offering to work for room and board. He got several responses from Italy, none from France. For the next six months, he worked for different wineries.

Then he was offered a job running a winery. By this time, Katy had finished her degree, so they both went to live in a tiny

*continued on page 6*

## South Clinton Gears Up; South Avenue Shines

By Eileen Thomas

Owners of commercial and mixed-use buildings in a three-block portion of South Clinton Ave. may apply for up to \$50,000 in matching funds for a full

building renovation, or up to \$10,000 in matching facade restoration funds.

The New York State Main Street Program awarded SWPC \$200,000 for South Clinton Av-

enue. Working in partnership with the ESCAPE (Evolving South Clinton Avenue Places & Environment) Committee, SWPC will use \$175,000 to provide matching facade and building restoration funds to property owners. The remaining \$25,000 will go towards streetscape enhancements.

Representatives of the ESCAPE Committee and several other South Clinton Ave. stakeholders will review applications and select the building owners who ultimately receive grants.

SWPC received a similar award for South Avenue in 2005. Recently finished facade work to the buildings surrounding the kiosk, and the renovation of the

Abeles Building, stand as perfect examples of the goals of the New York Main Street Program. The new awnings, updated signs and paint colors, and masonry repairs at 285 Gregory St, 315 Gregory St and 700 South Ave were subtle but very effective facade-related improvements that enhance the buildings and the intersection of South and Gregory both.

The full renovation of the Abeles building by Konar Properties returns an empty shell to full use with the opening of the South Wedge Green Grocer, the relocation of the Coffee Connection and the construction of four one-bedroom apartments. This

spectacular project exemplifies the goals of the New York Main Street Program. It is sensitive to the architecture and history of the building, it provides for businesses on the avenue and promotes living on our local "Main Street."

Two additional Main Street-funded projects are underway on South Ave. and three others will be starting construction soon. Between the anticipated South Clinton Ave. Multi-modal and Main Street construction, it is obvious that exciting revitalization continues in and around the South Wedge.

To learn more, contact Eileen Thomas at 256-1740, ext. 103. ▲



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## Straight Talk On NBN

By Dan Buyer

Earlier this fall, the City released its long-awaited evaluation of the Neighbors Building Neighborhood's process. By the time this edition of *The Wedge* hits the streets, the City may have already announced changes to the NBN process. At press time, the City had merged its Bureau of Neighborhood Initiatives into the Planning Bureau.

For those new to city life in Rochester, Neighbors Building Neighborhoods, or NBN, is the process through which City government solicits input and feedback from its citizens. The City is divided into 10 Sectors, each of which has its own citizen-led planning council. NBN has been around since 1994. Rochester, of course, has a much longer history of civic activism. SWPC, for instance, dates back to 1975, and many other community groups in Rochester date back to the 1960s.

Community groups are indigenous to their neighborhood, and in Rochester they grew up independent of any sort of regulation or structure. As a result, they exist in a patchwork of 30+ year old geographic boundaries that frequently overlap and don't make much sense. Adding to this confusion, there are many types of community groups with a wide variety of missions, funding and ability. We have block clubs, neighborhood associations, business associations, community development corporations, not-for-profit stakeholders, etc.

NBN represents the City's attempt to impose order onto this confusion. It imposes a systematic, equitable, City-created structure for civic engagement over the top of an organic, grassroots network of community groups, volunteers and citizen leaders. That's its strength, and its weakness.

The NBN Report outlines a number of key successes for the process, including improved citizen leadership and a long list of community projects. These



For what it's worth, neighborhood leaders tend to be somewhat maverick and independent by nature, so imposing a decision-making process onto them is always going to be a challenge. Encouraging a diversity of participation and viewpoints is essential. Mandating it will be difficult, but it is important to make sure all

the key stakeholders will be involved. For instance, perhaps it's time to insist on greater involvement by City Schools.

The bureaucratic process of dispensing NBN's funds to the Sectors is an example of antiquated and inefficient contracting procedures. As I've said before, we need a system that stops micro-managing and is based on outcomes. Those who perform get more; those who don't get less.

Properly-run sector planning councils can be a great venue to bring all of a community's stakeholders together on an equal playing field. These councils can facilitate a unified, grassroots plan and vision for the future of

their community. They should not, however, be expected to take the place of existing community groups in implementing that vision. Rochester's community groups are, by definition, owned and operated by neighbors they serve, and they should remain the central focal point for building stable, healthy neighborhoods.

In the end, the future success of NBN may depend on the approach taken by the City's Planning Bureau, which will now oversee the process in City Hall.

Putting NBN with the Planning Bureau means the City can now more closely link neighborhood planning with the City's overall land use planning. Moving forward, the Planning Bureau can mobilize City staff from different departments work side by side with neighbors and community groups to get things done. The Bureau will also need to have a greater role in budgeting or utilizing the outcomes in the neighborhood plans to drive the City's spending priorities.

The future of our City in large part depends on the vitality of its neighborhoods. NBN can be an important catalyst for building a stronger community. ▲

accomplishments, according to the report, justify the \$3.8 million the City has spent on NBN over the years. A key question is not whether those accomplishments are real, but whether they would have happened anyway whether NBN had been there or not.

In this area, we have been blessed with many hard working volunteer leaders in Sector 6. Sector leaders like David Chappius and Joan Lindburg would have been distinguished activists in the own right, with or without NBN. But both clearly blossomed and grew through the process. The case for giving direct credit to NBN for various bricks-and-mortar neighborhood projects is a little murkier. How much money can be directly linked to NBN depends on who's telling the story.

Additionally, the Report also lists a variety of challenges. These include a lack of participation by renters and minority residents, overly bureaucratic contracting procedures, integration of NBN into City Hall and a need for better consensus building in the Sectors planning councils.

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