

Avondale fights back, one street at a time



Mark Curnutte, mcurnutte@enquirer.com 9:02 a.m. EDT June 27, 2014



Bogart Avenue in Avondale, seen from the parking lot of the Avondale Town Center, will be dedicated tonight after houses on the street have received painting, new landscaping and brush clearing as part of an overall improvement plan. (Photo: The Enquirer/Mark Curnutte)

AVONDALE – After a deadly winter and spring in this Cincinnati neighborhood, Avondale residents and development investors will take a stand Friday night.

They will meet to dedicate a renovated house and celebrate the overall cleanup of the entire block – painting, new landscaping, brush clearing – of Bogart Avenue in the Avondale Town Center District.

"We're still here, and the fight on the side of good is picking up momentum against the side of bad," said Avondale resident Ozie Davis, executive director of the Avondale Comprehensive Development Corp.

But Friday's celebration is about much more than just the one house.

After two peaceful years, violence exploded in this predominantly African-American community since the first of the year. Of the city's 39 homicides through Thursday, nine have taken place in Avondale.



Cal Barrett, 50, a contract painter, puts primer on the porch at 3568 Bogart Ave., Avondale, as part of an overall street cleanup and restoration. (Photo: The Enquirer/Mark Curnutte)

After tying Over-the-Rhine with 11 homicides in 2011, the most of any city neighborhood, Avondale had only one in 2012 – a police-involved shooting of a suspected drug dealer – and four in 2013.

Still, the effort that began in 2007 will not stop. Too much momentum has built, including receipt of a \$29.5 million Choice Neighborhoods Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in December 2012. Adding to 2007's momentum was a group of investors – among them the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), JPMorgan Chase and Community Building Institute – that began putting money into the neighborhood, population 12,500, for various human and physical development programs designed to improve the quality of life.

Those investors are still there, joined by others, none deterred by the violent first half of 2014. Other institutions involved in the Bogart Avenue project are the Cincinnati-Hamilton

County Community Action Agency and the African-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky, which helped to secure minority contractors for the work.



In one year, several investment partners in Avondale remodeled the house at 3561 Bogart Ave., near the Avondale Town Center, which will be dedicated Friday night with a ribbon cutting. (Photo: The Enquirer/Mark Curnutte)

"The redevelopment of the Town Center District is the linchpin of Avondale's renaissance," said Courtney Hodapp, vice president of global philanthropy for JPMorgan Chase.

The totally renovated house at 3561 Bogart Ave. is called Chase Rehab 1. The Avondale Comprehensive Development Corp. coordinated the project.

Street residents welcome the upgrade. Gloria Shabazz, 33, lives next door to the renovated house. She is a lifelong resident of Avondale, people who refer to themselves as "A-1 from Day 1."

"I like it a lot," Shabazz said. "It makes the street look so much nicer. If the troublemakers see we're dug in and caring for our street, maybe they think twice and stay away."

Contractors take pride in the street's look. It has one large apartment house and 15 free-standing homes. Three Habitat for Humanity houses are among the large two-story brick and frame houses that date to the early 20th century. Four of the older houses, nearest Glenwood Avenue, are boarded up.

Eric Standifer, 63, of M&M Construction & Remodeling, is among the contractors who've worked on the project since last year.

"For the most part, we want to bring the street back together," said Standifer, of Walnut Hills. "The objective of all this work is to make the houses and the street nice like they were back in the day. Maybe that will give people incentive to keep out the bad element."?

If you go

What: Dedication of home at 3561 Bogart Ave., Avondale

When: 6 p.m. Friday

Parking: Park in the lot of the Avondale Town Center, corner of Reading Road and Rockdale Avenue. Bogart Avenue is on the north side of the parking lot.



Eric Standifer, of M&M Construction & Remodeling, Walnut Hills, displays the restored wooden staircase of the home at 3561 Bogart Ave., Avondale. (Photo: Mark Curnutte/The Enquirer)