
ALLEGHENY WEST GAZETTE

December 2017

President's Message

So what are you doing on Tuesday evening? Each month this is where we make decisions about our neighborhood—decisions that in ways both small and large will affect you. And we always have a good time socializing and enjoying refreshments—especially at our last meeting before the holidays! Everyone is welcome—second Tuesday of each month, 7:30PM, in the Calvary Church social hall, corner of Beech and Allegheny (use the Beech Avenue entrance). The meeting is usually over by 9:00. It's also a great way for newer folks to meet your neighbors and get involved! We hope to see you on Tuesday evening!

As we continue our year-long celebration of the Civic Council's 55th Anniversary, our story has entered the 1980s. Every December, our neighborhood calendar is dominated by the event that was born early in that decade, and remains both our biggest source of funds and our best goodwill ambassador to the outside world: The Allegheny West Christmas Candlelight House Tour.

As big as it is, our annual Christmas Tour was preceded in the 1970s and 1980s by an even bigger Allegheny West undertaking: SpringFest. This annual event was the catalyst for many now long-time residents and businesses to settle in our community. But after being crushed by torrential rains in 1980 and 1981, the Civic Council sought a marketing/fundraising tour format that would be less dependent on weather, cost less to produce, and require fewer volunteers to operate. We also hoped to find a way to rise above the clutter of nearly two dozen annual house tours that dotted the region.

In the early 1970s, the people of Allegheny West had initiated a program of public relations to attract new neighbors, and instituted an annual two-day event intended to publicize the community. The Allegheny West SpringFest was held on the third weekend of May each year. SpringFest was a very large house tour featuring as many as twenty homes open for touring—from fully restored Victorians to “works in progress” that had just been gutted. Tour visitors would purchase their tour ticket and receive a guidebook and map, which they could follow as they strolled through the neighborhood on a self-guided circuit.

On SpringFest weekend, Beech Avenue was cleared of cars and became a very large outdoor festival, with dozens of vendors for antiques, crafts, plants, and artwork. Food selections ranged from open pit barbecue and gyros to burgers and dogs—and even a quaint ice cream parlor staged in a shady garden. Throughout the neighborhood, entertainment stages featured dozens of live performances by musical groups of every genre, as well as live theater, puppetry, dance, and even poetry recitals. Professional stages and seating were installed at both ends of Beech, and front porches on Beech and Lincoln were pressed into service as additional stages. Pony rides, clowns, and magicians entertained the kids. Horse-drawn wagon rides (Clydesdales!) offered a narrated tour of the neighborhood. And visitors enjoyed displays of antique cars, watched artisans working at white-hot forges in iron or glass, and learned macramé or chair caning. Hot air balloon ascensions even provided a true birds-eye-view ... in 1979 we almost lost then-Mayor Dick Caliguiri as he was cutting the ribbon to open the event from the basket of a balloon 100 feet above Brighton Road!

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Our first Christmas Tour, in 1982, was planned in just seven weeks. The three day event featured six restored homes decorated for a nineteenth-century Christmas, and introduced the new-to-us concepts of advance ticket sales, timed group tour departures, and tour guides for each group. As the first holiday home annual tour in the city, it was an immediate success—as it remains nearly four decades later.

After the last tour group had left on the final night of that first year's tour, all of the six homes' owners gathered for a late dinner at 937 Beech Avenue. Seated around the table were a dozen exhausted-but-happy neighbors. Some had been painting ceilings literally as the first group on Friday was entering their home.

They ate because they were starved, and they chattered excitedly because each had wonderful stories of this new kind of tour to share. And although it was late and they were all very tired, only Alex Watson actually fell asleep at the table ... really! For the next 30 years, he would laugh and acknowledge that he had never been so tired in his life.

— John DeSantis, AWCC President

AWCC Calendar

Tuesday, December 12 @7:30 p.m.

General Membership Meeting @ Calvary Church

Tuesday, December 19 @ 7:30 p.m.

Housing & Planning Committee Meeting, @ AWCC Office (806 Western)

Tuesday, December 26 @ 7:30 p.m.

Executive Committee Meeting, @AWCC Office (806 Western)

DRAFT Agenda: AWCC Membership Meeting

Tuesday, November 14 at 7:30 P.M.

- Visitors
 - Councilwoman Harris's office
 - Mayor Peduto's office
 - Pittsburgh Police Zone 1
 - Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy – Allegheny Commons
- New neighbors and guests
- Reading of previous meeting's minutes
- Treasurer's report
- Committee reports
 - Membership
 - AW Bowling at the Elks
 - Ways & Means
 - AW Christmas Candelight House Tour (Initial report)
 - Update on five-year Calvary contract
 - Friends of Allegheny West - Green Space
 - Property
 - Housing & Planning updates
 - Parking & traffic issues
 - Blocks bounded by Western, Allegheny, Ridge, Bridge, MCC
 - Western Avenue revitalization (Electric relocations)
 - Light of Life Ridge Avenue project
 - Allegheny Commons update of 2002 Master Plan
 - Expansion of Historic District (LRC report)
 - Historic District enforcement issues – old cases
 - ZBA Appeal, new city zoning - Medical Marijuana Dispensary
 - Air BnB issues/impacts in AW
 - Comprehensive guidelines for new construction on vacant sites
 - Revised AW Film Guidelines
 - Nominating Committee: Need Membership Chair for 2018
- Northside Leadership Conference
- Old Business
- New Business
- Adjournment

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