

ALLEGHENY WEST GAZETTE

March 2010

Letter from the President

Proposed school closings and restructurings on the North Side have led to a series of discussions and community meetings with school board representatives. The level of concern is very high and community involvement has been strong. Andre Agassi recently wrote about the importance of education, as well as his school, The Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy, in his new book, *Open*. A poor student, Agassi's interest in education developed later in life and was influenced by a dinner with Nelson Mandela during at an event in Cape Town to raise money for the Nelson Mandela Foundation. Agassi wrote about how he felt embarrassed by his own lack of education, and how many thousands in his hometown are victims of not having an education, as well as how unaware of how much they are losing. The Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy turned into something Agassi always wanted: "something to play for that's larger than myself and yet still closely connected to me." Throughout the book, Agassi recounts his personal growth in great detail. Relationships, friendships, events, depression, dissatisfaction and victories all go together to shape his life. Helping others, he finds, is the "only thing we can do that has any lasting meaning or value."

Agassi was driven into tennis by his father and he reminds readers of his hatred of the game on many occasions throughout the book. "I don't like sports," he tells Kevin Costner. "I hate tennis most of all." Agassi works hard to put fame out of his mind:

I'm struck by how fast the surreal becomes the norm. I marvel at how unexciting it is to be famous, how mundane famous people are. They're confused, uncertain, insecure, and often they hate what they do.

Turning away from fame and in the spirit of helping others, Agassi decided to locate his academy in the worst neighborhood of West Las Vegas, where it serves as a beacon. He found an eight acre piece of land in the middle of an urban wasteland, "surrounded by pawn shops and homes on the verge of being torn down."

The last chapter of the book is called "The Beginning." It is the end of Agassi's tennis career and the beginning of the rest of his life. The Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy has grown to a 26,000-square-foot education complex with 500 students, and an additional 800 on wait list. The \$40 million campus features a computer room, a TV production studio, lecture hall, exercise and weight rooms. The area has not totally rebounded since the Academy opened - while Agassi was giving a tour someone was shot across the street, "and yet in eight years not one window has been broken, not one wall has been sprayed with graffiti."

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March/April 2010 Calendar of Events

AWCC General Membership Meeting
Calvary United Methodist Church
Tuesday, March 9 @ 7:30 pm
Tuesday, April 13 @ 7:30 pm

March Agenda

- i. Reading of January 2010 Minutes
- ii. Treasurer's Report
- iii. Committee Reports
- iv. Ways and Means
- v. Housing & Planning
- vi. Old Business
- vii. New Business

AWCC Committee Meetings

Housing & Planning Meeting
852 Beech Ave.
Tuesday, March 16 @ 7:30 pm
Tuesday, April 20 @ 7:30 pm

AWCC Executive Committee Meeting
858 Beech Ave.
Tuesday, March 30 @ 7:30 pm

North Avenue Sub-Committee Meeting
Hoi Polloi
Tuesday, April 2 @ 7:30 pm



Allegheny West Civic Council
812 Western Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15233
(412) 323-8884

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Everyone respects the school because everyone owns it.
As Agassi writes:

Everywhere you look are little touches, subtle details that signify this school is different, this place is about excellence, through and through. On the front window is etched one large word, our unofficial motto: BELIEVE. Every classroom is flooded with natural daylight. Our grounds are designed like a college campus, with intimate quads and welcoming common areas. Don't get comfortable, we tell them. College is the main goal. College banners line the walls. A main hallway is named College Street. A metal sky bridge between the two main buildings has never been used, and never will be used, until the first seniors receive their diplomas and embark for college in 2009. Walking across that bridge, the seniors will enter a secret room, sign their names in a ledger, and leave notes to the next class, and the next, and all senior classes to come. I'm already obsessing over my speech.

John McDanel
AWCC President

Western Avenue Update

While it seems like the massive amounts of snow have completely stopped work on the Western Avenue Neighborhood Improvement District, it hasn't! Work has continued on the engineering of the electric service moves for the 26 properties (out of a total of 76 properties) that still receive their electric service from lines running down Western Avenue.

The electric service moves are no small task. Each property provides its own set of challenges. However we have contracted with an electrical engineering company to engineer these moves at a minimum intrusion to the individual property owners while accomplishing our over all task of removing all of those ugly service wires from Western Avenue. This contractor, along with our approved electricians, have very good working relationships with the City and Duquesne Light and we feel confident that this part of the project will flow as smoothly as the first parts of the project!

As soon as the electric service moves have been completed, the tall pendant streetlights on the north side of the street will be installed and the wooden boxes will be removed. Trees will follow shortly thereafter.

Our contractor still needs to return to finish the punch list (items that need to be finished/corrected before the contractor receives his final payment). My best efforts and threats did not inspire our contractor to finish up before the snow started in December. However our contractor is back on board to finish up the punch list as soon as the weather allows.

For those who don't know, or don't remember, the property owners on Western Avenue were assessed a tax to cover approximately a quarter of the total cost of this project - \$125 per lineal foot of frontage on their property. It works out to \$400,000 of the total \$1.7 million project is funded by Western Avenue property owners. Over half of that money has been paid or is committed to be paid on a schedule. As expected, about fifteen property owners have not paid a penny of their assessment. In just a week or so, these folks will receive a final request from our lawyers and will then have a tax lien filed on their property. While I won't "out" these folks, tax liens are a matter of public record and in about two months you will be able to do a search on the Allegheny County Assessment website (Western Avenue, 22nd Ward) and see who has had liens filed against them.

With all of this work still to be completed you might be wondering, "When is this all going to be finished?" My goal to finish this project and get my life back is June 1! This is a moving target but I'm going to do all that I can do to meet this goal.

Once the construction part of this project is done there is still work to be done to take care of the upgrades and continue to grow the thriving business district. If you are interested in becoming a part of the success of Western Avenue after the construction is over, please contact Gloria Rayman at 412-231-1795 or glowalks@comcast.net.

Yours in progress,
Gloria Rayman



Volunteers Needed!

The AWCC Board of Directors is still looking for a Membership Chair for 2010. The main role of the Membership Chair is to coordinate the three summer neighborhood picnics (Memorial Day, July 4 and Labor Day). In lieu of one person chairing this committee, the Board is asking for three volunteers – or three groups of volunteers - to take on the responsibility for each picnic. We have a budget for these picnics to cover drinks, paper goods and the main course and will work with the individuals to make sure no one does unnecessary work (like giving the details on how to get a permit to close the street for the party – a function of the City Engineering department – not DPW!)

If you are interested in being the “host” for one picnic, please contact Gloria Rayman at 412-231-1795 or glowalks@comcast.net.

AWCC Membership

Membership is open to all residents of Allegheny West

To become an AWCC member, send your Name, Address, Phone Number and email address to:

Allegheny West Civic Council - Membership Chair
812 Western Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15233

2009 Annual Dues are \$3 and Lifetime Dues are \$45.
Checks should be made payable to AWCC.

Or you can pay for your membership online with your credit card! Go to www.alleghenywest.org/shop – and pick “memberships” from the menu on the left. If you are unsure of your membership status, please send an email to info@alleghenywest.org and we will look in the membership file! Your paid membership enables you to vote at monthly membership meetings.

Community Meeting regarding Preservation and Reuse of the former Library building at Allegheny Center

Please join the New Hazlett Theater, City of Pittsburgh, and the Community Design Center of Pittsburgh, along with their partners at the Children’s Museum and the Warhol Museum, for a planning session regarding the preservation and reuse of the former library building, located at Allegheny Center.

When: Wednesday, March 17, 2010 at 6:30 PM

Where: The New Hazlett Theater located at 6 Allegheny Center in Pittsburgh’s North Side

The New Hazlett Theater has engaged Loysen + Kreuthmeier Architects to develop preliminary programming recommendations and plans for the preservation and reuse of this important historic structure. This Community Meeting will include a review of programming ideas and presentation of initial reuse options. An additional community meeting on Monday, April 5 at 6:30 will include a presentation of the final report.

For questions or to be added to the e-mail contact list for this project, please contact Melinda Pietrusza at the New Hazlett Theater via e-mail at melinda.hazlett@gmail.com

This is Renovation Time Your LRC is Here to Help

Allegheny West homeowners and businesspeople, are you contemplating exterior renovations to your property this spring? If so, you may want to contact your Local Historic Review Committee. We are a group of residents and property owners convened by the City Historic Review Commission to review exterior renovation projects and to help property owners manage the building permit process.

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Because Allegheny West is a City Historic District, all exterior work needs a Certificate of Appropriateness as well as a Building Permit. Once you have a concept, idea, or plan, check the Allegheny West Historic Guidelines. If your project fits the guidelines or is fairly simple and straightforward, such as painting, you may be able to get approval for a certificate of appropriateness and building permit "over the counter" at 200 Ross Street Downtown. The person you will need to contact for this is Katie Molnar, the City Historic Preservation Planner, 412-255-2243 or Katherine.Molnar@city.pittsburgh.pa.us. However, if you are planning a more significant project, such as replacement of windows or doors with new materials, installation of a fence, or an addition, you will need to have a hearing before the Historic Review Commission. In the second instance, please contact us, your local committee. We will review your plans, make recommendations, and help you get through the process.

Warning – Do not proceed with work without a building permit! Property owners who have done so in the past have been cited by Building Inspection. Time and money had to be expended to resolve the situations, and projects were delayed.

Your Local Historic Review Committee meets once a month to review projects. To get on the agenda, call Carole Malakoff at (412) 321-3612 or e-mail CaroleMalakoff@hotmail.com.

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COUNCIL

EDITOR: GENE WILSON

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