



Gifford Park's Pride

Gifford Park Neighborhood: A Great Place to Live, Work, Learn, and Play
www.giffordparkomaha.org

March-April 2020

A Publication of the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association

Neighborhood Point People

By Alex O'Hanlon

There are a lot of things that we all love about the neighborhoods of Midtown. The diverse housing stock, big trees, big parks, chatting in line at Danny's, the weekly Friday Market, the patio at the Cali Bar. What makes all of these things run is neighbors. And neighbors are stepping up during the Coronavirus Pandemic to show up for each other.

A few weeks ago some neighbors from Gifford Park, Joslyn Castle, The Saddle Creek Corridor, and Montclair neighborhoods got together (while maintaining a 6 foot distance, and over Zoom) to brainstorm ideas for supporting each other through social distancing. They developed resources from examples of mutual aid networks in other parts of the country. These resources took the shape of google forms that are available on Facebook where neighbors can offer support or request support. The information from the forms is then available on



Neighborhood Point Person Julie Smith bringing a burst of color to the sidewalk near 34th and California St.

EVENT UPDATES

- **Easter Egg Hunt (scheduled for April 11th) CANCELLED**
- **GPNA Neighborhood Meeting (scheduled for May 7th) CANCELLED**
- **Neighborhood Spring Cleanup (scheduled for June 6th) CANCELLED**

spreadsheets that all neighbors can access so that if they need something they can reach out to folks who are offering and if they are able to offer something they can check the spreadsheet to see if anyone needs the type of support they are able to offer. Neighbors also realized that many folks don't use the internet. So they devised the Neighborhood Point Person plan. The group created flyers that explain the mutual aid project. Neighborhood Point People (NPP) then (practicing social distancing and proper hygiene) write their names and phone numbers on the flyers and deliver them to their designated area. Folks without internet access can then contact their NPP if they need any type of assistance and the NPP can use the spreadsheets to help organize assistance for the person in need. You may have received a flyer. The core organizers also collected all the resources in a google folder that is public and available for folks who want to create a hyper local mutual aid network in their neighborhoods. Folks in Hanscom Park, Benson and The Parker Action Alliance have already begun their own mutual aid programs.

We aren't sure how long this pandemic will last, and folks may be affected by the economic fall out for a longer period of time. Furthermore, we can continue to support **(Continued on page 2)**

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From the President:

Spring has sprung!

That usually means a lot in our neighborhood. It is the sign that neighborhood programs and activities will soon fill our calendars for the whole season...

Unfortunately, this year will be different.

Spring has sprung again, and with it came a pandemic that hits our community and the world. It is something unlike anything we have experienced before, something we don't really see, something that is hard to understand, something that makes us feel powerless, something that is already changing our lives forever.

But together we will overcome, together we will be stronger, and together we will celebrate again when all this is over.

For the time being, let's fight the spread of the virus together by following expert advice: practice social distancing, stay at home as much as possible, wash your hands. Take care of your family and loved ones. Reach out to your friends and neighbors, offer help... but keep your distance, literally!

This newsletter is full of resources for you to use during the crisis. Solidarity has never been so strong!

We may each be in isolation, but we are all together.

For everyone's sake, let's all stay safe and, together, let's keep our community spirit!

-Marie H el ne

(POINT PEOPLE continued from page 1) each other through mutual aid efforts even outside of pandemics and economic crises. If you would like to get involved please email mutualaidnetworkomaha@gmail.com. You can help by being a NPP for areas that have not already been reached, or helping to provide resources. If you are sick or currently quarantined to monitor symptoms you can also join in from your home by helping to make sure that offered resources and requests are linked. Additionally, if you need resources please don't hesitate to use the google form to request resources. We are here to support each other.

When asked why they wanted to participate one NPP said "I wanted to make sure that I got connected to a way to exchange services and assistance in this uncertain time. I especially wanted to reach out to the people near by me, who share this wonderful neighborhood, but who I don't know personally enough for us to have each other's contact information...people in our communities, when we connect with and care about each other, can...meet each others' needs and share responsibilities." I couldn't agree more. Now is the time to develop a mutual aid network to carry us through our current crises and allow us to come out of it a stronger community. Thanks to everyone for doing your part no matter how large or small. We are in this together and will see each other soon!

Editor's note: If you have news of interest to the Gifford Park Neighborhood, we encourage you to submit an article for the monthly newsletter. Editorials are subject to approval by the GPNA Executive Board. Please include your contact information. Articles may be submitted by email to jessiefisherart@gmail.com



Big Muddy Urban Farm Update

By Brent Lubbert

The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly changed our plans for public events moving forward, but it has not changed our plans to grow and deliver fresh, nutritious food to our community in an accessible, equitable way.

During the winter months, Aspiring Farmer Residents collaborated on a business plan and built their growing skills through a series of workshops. This is the first time Big Muddy brought in practicing farmers and experts to teach lessons ranging from soil health to irrigation to seed selection. We want to thank Cait Caughey, Alex O'Hanlon, Aaron French, Tyler Magnuson, and John Porter for facilitating instruction and building a community of practice around urban agriculture in Omaha.

Now the residency cohort is working together on preparing garden beds and planting out a wide variety of vegetables. We are currently revising our business plan within the context of changing social practices like physical distancing and the increased need for food assistance in our community. Please check our website (www.bigmuddyurbanfarm.org) and Facebook page in the weeks ahead for further updates regarding our CSA program and plant sale.

If you have not seen a farm plot yet this season, I encourage you to stop by one and watch what grows throughout the spring. This group of residents is doing an excellent job and has already planted peas and

potatoes with so much more to come. You can find a map on our website. Viewing the plots may be a helpful visual as we move through this pandemic as a community.

Thankfully, gardening is one activity that is not cancelled this spring and a great way to explore STEM learning with kids in your homeschooling curriculum. Let us know if you have any questions with setting up a garden by sending a message to info@bigmuddyurbanfarm.org or calling Brent Lubbert at (402) 213-9646.



“Clean Up Crew” Show Gifford Park Some Love Despite Cancellation of Event

While out on a run, Eliza Perry passed by a few incredibly kind neighbors and their pups cleaning up the park Saturday morning, March 21st. A clean-up that was organized by Grae (right) was one of many events (with a projected turnout of greater than 10 people) which, sadly, had to be cancelled this month. However, this small crew decided to show up and show care as planned. Thank you so much to Creighton University students (left to right) Sydney, Alex, Kohei, and Grae for spending a Saturday morning caring for our shared home - Gifford Park! *Note: disruption to social distancing precautions was only momentary as the photographer asked everyone to gather for the photo.*



👉 Please Support the GPNA! 👈

It's that time of year again to renew your membership to the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association! Not a member...well then it's a perfect time to become one! For only \$10 per year for individuals, \$15 per year for families, and \$25 for businesses you gain the opportunity to not only learn about the latest things happening in our area through our monthly newsletter and neighborhood meetings, but also the ability to become involved in an assortment of activities to help grow and strengthen our neighborhood. Our members are the foundation of the GPNA, and the greater our membership base the more we can do to serve and enhance the Gifford Park neighborhood! To renew your membership, use the form on the last page of the newsletter and mail your payment to: Gifford Park Neighborhood Association, PO Box 31462 Omaha, NE 68131. Remember we are a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization. Thank you to those who have already sent in their dues - we really appreciate your support!

Neighborhood “Safari”

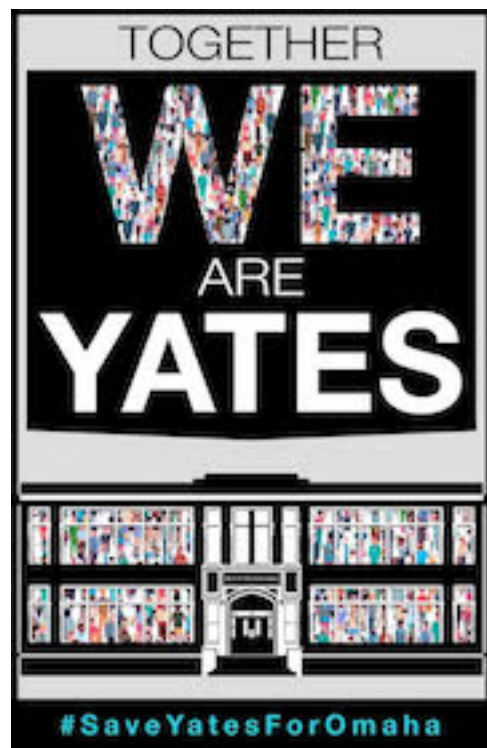
by Rose Carlson



Have you ever been on a safari? Let's create one for our Gifford Park kids in this time of uncertainty when they cannot go to school or play with friends! Place a stuffed bear, lion, elephant, whatever you have, in your window, so that when people are out for a walk, they can help their kids count the number of “exotic “ animal sightings. (Yes, bears count for this safari, because it's an item lots of people have.) If you don't have any stuffed animals, be creative! What might kids like to see in your window? Even a picture or short message would be great! It's a small way to show that we are still connected even when we are isolated, and to build community during a trying time.

Save Yates Update

The Gifford Park Neighborhood Association continues to work with OPS and potential community partners to develop a community-based and community-supported funding and programming plan for the building. This includes a proposal to buy Yates, which is currently owned by OPS. An excellent visioning session was held on February 6th at Yates. Facilitated by neighbor Julie Smith and Michael Van Sant of ONE Omaha, the session got dozens of neighbors talking about what they would most like to see offered in the building - things like job training, science and technology programming, visual and performing arts, commercial kitchen space, childcare, social services, and recreation. The most supported idea to emerge from this event was for the historic building at 32nd and Davenport to be operated as an accessible, affordable community center with a great mix of creative uses for all. Obviously, the current public health emergency has temporarily slowed this effort. Stay tuned for more updates in the upcoming May newsletter, and follow Save Yates for Omaha on facebook. You can also email saveyatesforomaha@gmail.com if you have any ideas you'd like to share, or to join the ongoing effort!.



Gifford Park Neighborhood Market Update

By Alex O'Hanlon

The past few weeks have been a whirlwind and certainly a lot to take in. It is ironic and poetic that in a time of social distancing we need to support each other more than ever. The GPNM management team wants to extend a greeting of gratitude and support to our community for doing what we all need to do; whether that is stay home, go to work, garden your front yard, organize mutual aid or attend zoom meetings from dawn til dusk. We appreciate you.

We are still trying to figure out what social distancing means for the market. Right now the Nebraska Food Council is lobbying the governor to consider farmer's markets as essential business. It is our dream that we could open up the season as planned, starting with our fundraiser barbecue, and that the Market season could go forward as normal (but as always, just a little bigger and better than last year). However, it is unclear and possibly unlikely that this will be the case. Therefore, it is our hope that we will be able to continue the Market, albeit possibly in a limited capacity, following recommendations laid out by the CDC. However, at this point, we just don't know. So please stay tuned as we will keep you all updated.

We do know a couple of things. We know that we will work with other partners to make sure that fresh produce is available in our neighborhood throughout the growing season. We will also do everything we can to provide a platform for local makers to share their talents with their neighbors. And as always, we know, that in whatever capacity the Market continues this year, that we will do our best to support small businesses by providing tents and tables and no entrance fee.

In the meantime, if you are interested in vending at the market, email GPNMarket@gmail.com and we will send you an online application and keep you updated on how we will be moving forward as soon as we know. You can also follow us on Facebook for updates. Stay strong, neighbors! We will see you soon!



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Restore Nebraska Conference- The 15th Year



Omaha; Reception at Kiewit Tower and sneak peek tour of the former Blackstone Hotel set to open this summer; Book sale; Restore Jam with personal testimonials from Gifford Park neighborhood change-agents. This event offers the perfect opportunity to connect with hundreds of people who love old buildings and are looking for products and services to make their restorations successful. Check out a listing in Restoration Exchange's on-line resource directory on their website: www.restorationexchangeomaha.org. Restoration Exchange Omaha is an organization which promotes preservation and restoration of old buildings. On behalf of GPNA, special thank you's to Nicole Malone, Restore Nebraska Conference Chair for the past 10 years, and Kristine Gerber who has been heavily involved with the conference since the beginning 15 years ago – you both have inspired many of us in Gifford Park, we appreciate your support of GPNA all these years!

February 28 & 29 marked the 15th year for the Restore Nebraska (formerly Restore Omaha) Conference. Restoration Exchange Omaha and History Nebraska presented a hands-on interactive and educational conference held at the historic Fort Omaha/ Metro Community College campus. The conference included nearly 20 breakout sessions and workshops to restore, revive, and preserve older homes, buildings, and neighborhoods. Highlights and workshops included: keynote Bob Yapp, president of the Belvedere School for Hands-On Preservation in Hannibal, Missouri; Bernice Radle, owner of Buffalove Development and Little Wheel Restoration Co. in Buffalo, New York, discussed small scale incremental neighborhood development; Buying and selling old and historic homes; Repairing old windows, plaster, stucco, tiles; History of downtown Omaha, South Omaha, Fort



Community Bike Project Omaha Update

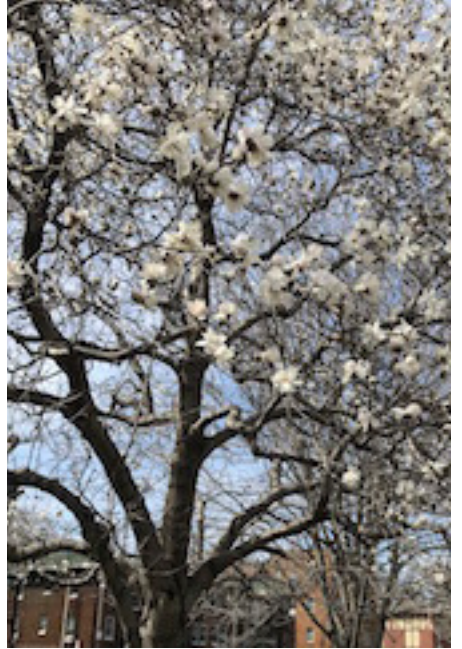
By Adam Blowers

Well the year started off pretty good for the Bike Project. We did some heavy duty cleaning and emptying out of the place to get ready for spring and we were about to fire up our Earn-a-Bike programming. Well, you see where this is going don't you? Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that we run a community space, we have decided to close the doors. We will reopen when OPS resumes normal scheduling. Until then we hope to have some projects started up soon to help those who still need parts for their bike. Our outdoor stand and tools are always available, and the pump is back in working order (look for improvements on that soon as well). While our doors are closed we

are still committed to ensuring that everyone in Omaha has access to a bicycle and the parts needed to fix it. Check us out on facebook for updates about what we are up to and how you might be able to help. Also, if you can, support the local Omaha bike shops during this time. Even if it's just a tube purchase or a small accessory, bike shop margins are thin and some may not survive this. Stay healthy and hope to see everyone soon!



Around the Neighborhood



Hey Gifford Park!

by Eric Purcell

Have we met yet? We're a coffeehouse located in your neighborhood and owned by four of your neighbors. Like everyone else, Corona Virus and Social Distancing has created some unique challenges for each of us as individuals, families and as a business. But it's also created some new opportunities. The best opportunity we've experienced so far is the chance to meet more of you, our actual neighbors...from 6 feet away, of course!



When things started getting crazy and our kids were told they'd have an extra long "spring break", we began to make some changes at the shop too. It started with extra cleaning. But just a few days later it turned into closing our dining room, setting up online ordering and opening our "Walk-up Window". It's been a whirlwind for sure. Sales have dropped pretty significantly. In the first weeks, we were blown away by the loving support of our customers who intentionally bought extra stuff to support our small business. But we realize that folks whose lives, rhythms and routines have all been turned upside down can only do so much. Things began to feel pretty bleak for Myrtle & Cypress Coffeehouse.

Then, a beautiful thing happened. Someone from the neighborhood who we'd never met stopped by our Walk-Up-Window and ordered a drink. They were out on a walk to stretch their legs and take a little break. When they asked how long we'd been open, they were shocked to hear it had been over a year and a half! "How did I not know about you?" they gasped! Guess what? A version of that conversation has happened nearly every day the last couple of weeks.

We were stunned! In the midst of a global crisis, we saw sunshine in our little corner of the world. It's spring! New things are growing, and we

are waking up to some of the good that can come out of this mess. Our coffee shop is in a little green house with minimal signage, so often people drive right past without noticing. Right now, people are slowing down and spending more time with the people closest to them. That means we are meeting more of you, our neighbors, and we are so grateful!

I think there is opportunity for all of us in the middle of hard things, and we are ready to take this opportunity to let more of our neighbors know about our little shop. Our mission has always been to create a place for community and connection, and we believe we have a chance to do that even better now. You, our Gifford Park, Joslyn Castle, Bemis Park and Montclair neighbors, are, literally, the reason we're here!

Next time you're out on a walk around Gifford Park, stop by! We want to meet you, brighten your day with a tasty drink or pastry, and help you stay sane through all of the craziness!

Then, someday soon, (when we can safely open our doors again), stay awhile, so you can meet up with a friend, enjoy a cozy corner in the house and feel even more

connected in our community.

Oh...and check out our ad below for a sweet deal!

Your Neighborhood Coffeehouse



MYRTLE & CYPRESS

COFFEEHOUSE

Have we met yet?
Mention this ad for
1/2 OFF one item.

Call: (402) 720-4873

Walk-up-Window: 517 N 33rd St

Online: www.myrtleandcypresscoffee.com

Neighborhood in the Time of a Pandemic

by Susan Mayberger, GPNA Board Member

COVID 19 became real for me on Sunday, March 15th when I received a text from my friend Sharon saying that we had been exposed to the virus at a meeting that we had both attended the previous Wednesday. I was one of the 30 people that had attended an informational session on a planned trip to Spain sponsored by the Tri-Faith Initiative. Pastor Eric had just returned from Spain a few days earlier. This was before the President's speech and before Spain was listed as a hot spot for the virus. We practiced what we thought was social distancing, meaning no handshakes or hugs, but in looking back we were sitting next to each other in circle and we were certainly not six feet apart. Pastor Eric had minimal symptoms that he attributed to his seasonal allergies and he only went for a test when Spain was listed as a hot spot the following day. He was diagnosed with the virus late Friday night.

I received the email from UNMC explaining how I was to self-quarantine and how to report my temperature and any symptoms twice a day. The worst part was realizing how many people that I could have infected between my attendance at the meeting and the text message about my exposure – my parents (in their 80s), my sister, my brother and his entire family, my closest friends and two nieces not to mention my husband. I had not been that worried about the virus since I see myself as having good health but realizing that my good health would not necessarily protect those that I loved if I transmitted it to them.

I realize that all of us are impacted by the pandemic and that our lives are very different at this time. We are working from home, maintaining social distancing of at least six feet, not having contact with people that are more at risk and finding ways to connect with others through technology. But I also see our Gifford Park neighborhood responding in additional positive ways. I see people greeting each other from a distance, neighbors checking in by phone or internet with neighbors, people picking up litter as they walk, positive affirmations written in chalk on the sidewalks, and friends helping others out by picking up food or prescriptions. We are all in this together and together we will come out of this.

I am on Day 12 of my self-quarantine as I write this and I continue to be symptom free. I wasn't able to get a test so I don't know for sure if I have it but the good news is that all of the people that I was in contact with are also OK. During these days, I have found "A Prayer for a Pandemic" quite comforting – it is circulating on the internet so you may have seen it. I wanted to end my article by sharing a few lines from it –

*May we who are merely
inconvenienced, remember
those whose lives are at stake.*

*May we who have no risk factors,
remember those most
vulnerable.*

*May we who have the luxury of
working from home, remember
those who must choose between
preserving their health or making
their rent.*

*May we who have to cancel our trips,
remember those who have to
safe place to go.*

*May we who settle in for a quarantine
at home, remember those who
have no home.*

*As fear grips our country, let us
choose love.*



Community Garden/Youth Garden/ Adventure Playground Update

Like so many activities right now, we are playing it by ear and will follow social distancing and health guidelines at the community garden and Adventure Playground located at 35th & Cass St. Starting in April and weather permitting, we will have someone at the community garden Wednesday's 6-8pm through the growing season to open the garden shed and turn on water for gardeners tending their plots or helping to weed/ plant other planting areas. We'll be adding Saturdays as well. We encourage people to bring their own gloves, and to wash their hands before and after working at the garden. We will also have

hand sanitizer on hand. We will wait and see about when youth garden and Adventure Playground will start and how exactly it will operate...stay tuned for more information in our May newsletter in a few weeks. Everyone is welcome to stop by anytime to check out the chickens and 2-story tree house. If you have questions about the community garden, contact Chris Foster (402-290-8187 or foster3413@cox.net); for garden plot information, contact Mike Caban (402-341-4722 or caban3321@cox.net); for Adventure Playground, contact Chris Foster, or text Monica Lehn 402-660-9046, or email us at sfadventureplayground@gmail.com or on Facebook.

Mutual Aid Food Distribution

Thank you to organizers and contributors who helped get food in the hands of neighbors on April 4th! This ongoing distribution happens every first Saturday of the month at 515 N 33rd St.



If you would like to contribute non-perishable food items, toilet paper, diapers (sizes 3, 4, 5, or 6), baby wipes, or paper grocery bags to this monthly free distribution, you can leave them in the clear plastic container on the porch at 515 N 33rd Street any time.

Fresh produce can be dropped off between 8am and 10am on May 2nd.



Update on the Rental Registration Inspection Ordinance

By Chris Foster

In April of last year the city council passed and the mayor signed a rental registration and inspection ordinance. The main purposes of the ordinance were to address substandard rental property, enforce a minimum standard of healthy and safe living conditions, and preserve neighborhood quality. The GPNA lobbied and spoke in favor of the ordinance.

All landlords needed to register their properties with the city by March 31, 2020. It is illegal to rent property without registration. Registration is free.

As of April 5th, over 60,000 units had registered out of a total of 80,000 to 90,000 rental units in the city’s jurisdiction.

The ordinance sets up two types of city inspections of rental property - annual and ten-year. In April the city will begin annual inspections on rental properties that meet any of three criteria:

- *Property had code violation in prior three years that were not remedied in the time allowed plus extensions.*
- *Future situations where code violation on rental properties are not remedied in time allowed plus extensions*
- *Property owner fails to register property in a timely manner*

What the neighborhood can do

Since the deadline for timely registration has now passed, this presents an opportunity for neighborhood association action. The city website has a detailed map of registered properties – be they single-family rentals, duplexes, condos, or multi-unit properties. (<https://omaha-rental-registration.constantcontactsites.com/map->)

You can enter an address on your block to zoom into the neighborhood to see who registered. But it also allows you to note those properties that you know are rentals but have not registered. While practicing social distancing, a

pair of neighbors could walk their block and write down the unregistered rental addresses. A list of unregistered rental properties can then be turned into City Planning, to begin a process of putting those properties on the annual inspection list. Properties on the annual inspection list must pass two consecutive inspections before they get off the annual inspection list and onto the ten year inspection list.

In 2022, the city will begin the ten year inspection cycle. Council Bluffs follows the best practice of a three year cycle of inspections. We hope a future city council and mayor make adjustments and improvements as the ordinance is implemented. But the city says they do intend to start in older neighborhoods, and so we hope Gifford Park does see its fair share of inspections in 2022.

Another concern is that while registration information is supposed to be publicly available, it does not appear that contact numbers are going to be made public. It has been our hope that registration would help neighbors contact landlords with concerns.

The ordinance is a first step.

More about the ordinance

In multi-unit properties, a 15% representative sample must be selected. If code violations are found in 20% of the sample, all units will have to be inspected.

Landlords are charged \$125 for inspections. This will not be sufficient to fund the program. The lack of an annual registration fee means that general city funds will make up the difference to operate the program.

A sign must be posted in each rental unit with phone numbers of property owner, property manager, and city code enforcement division.

To learn how you can work with others to assure that all families have access to safe, affordable housing, contact the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association. You could also reach out to the OTOC Housing & Neighborhood Revitalization Team at otocfornebraska@gmail.com

Gifford Park Tree of the Month

by Tyler Magnuson

Burr Oak - *Quercus macrocarpa*

Burr Oak, majestically silhouetted against the sky, the pioneer tree of the great plains. This tree species is the grandest of all the oaks, native or introduced, in Nebraska. It's limbs branch out at almost 90 degree angles and create a wide swath of shade. With old age some of the limbs even can droop all the way to touch the ground. Standing underneath one you might feel as if the oak has created it's own little world, and it has! These trees spread and survived on the prairie because they can withstand grass fires and the unique oak savanna habitat that they coexist in can be see in various parks and natural areas around this bio-region (Old Town Conservation Area and Hitchcock contain examples of this). There are many younger Burr Oaks planted in the neighborhood and a good collection of older ones across Cuming St. in Bemis Park but one of the oldest sits next to the soccer field in Gifford Park. With a circumference of over 150 inches it is roughly 300 years old, making it the oldest living residence of the Gifford Park Neighborhood. This



tree has been pruned making it more upright than its wild cousins but you can identify it by the hairy tops on the acorns it drops. Many burr oaks in the neighborhood including this one have stem galls, growths that form when wasps lay eggs inside the plan tissue. Look for small black balls attached to the stem like tiny acorns. As always please send in recommendations for next month and keep an eye on any new trees on your block. They will provide food and shelter to countless mammals, insects and fungi and will shade generations to come.



The Faces of Omaha

by Adrian S. Petrescu

I encountered Omaha about four times. Of course everyone in the world, including me, knew Omaha Beach of D Day, but that doesn't count here.

The first time it was fifteen years ago. My "son" from South Texas came to a job interview as aerospace engineer in Lincoln. He flew to Omaha, got a rental car, and drove the I-80 stretch to Lincoln for the job interview, interviewed, drove back to Omaha, and flew back to South Texas. When I asked him how it was he

answered "it's all flat and smelling like manure." That was it. Ah, and that he really liked the Strategic Air Command Museum that he visited on his way back from Lincoln. That's all he had to say. Now, let me explain a little. At that time my friend had not been to New York City, or Philadelphia, or Chicago, or Los Angeles. But we had been together to Houston, San Antonio, Austin, or Corpus Christi Texas nonetheless. The comparisons available to him were limited back then. For the record, Octav is my friend, and my unofficially adopted son from South Texas, who now lives and works around Philadelphia, and who builds and tests helicopters. The "son" denomination (*continued on page 14*)

comes from one time when a colleague of mine from work who knew Octav independently of me saw us altogether on the South Padre Island beach, not social distancing after all, and he said looking at my friend “so she is your daughter—and looking at me—and he is your son, right?” Neither of us complained, and it stayed that way ever since. It’s a fuzzy thing, as my daughter and Octav often acted more like kids both of them...



The second time I learned about Omaha was ten years ago this coming November. I in turn flew to Omaha from Brussels Belgium for a job interview. Apparently, I was unaffected by my friend’s terrible earlier stereotyping. From the phone interview the folks I spoke with sounded great and from my research the university and its students all sounded cool, the place looked good, and I was ready to give Omaha a try, so I prepared and I flew in. My boss who was organizing and hosting the onsite job interview did her best to sell me on the city and its surroundings. Bellevue University had me stay at a hotel right on Dodge St., close to downtown, they made the interview site visit four days long, and they gave me a binder full of tourist information and plenty of free time to wander around to take in the Old Market. One of the four days I got a tour by car around Omaha and Bellevue and into Council Bluffs and all around, offered by my boss. I learned that Greater Omaha has some really nice neighborhoods. Wandering in the Old Market I learned about all the great little odd stores and restaurants, and of the vibrant life of the town till odd hours in the morning. No, not really till odd hours in the morning... I had a job interview and classroom teaching presentation to be ready for after all. I got the job offer the Saturday of the trip. Sunday morning I got half a day to spend with a great real estate agent referred by my boss to tour houses for sale in

Dundee, in Council Bluffs, in Bellevue, and everywhere in between. I’ve sampled some really nice houses, and had lunch in Council Bluffs in a nice little restaurant. Little did the real estate agent know how difficult buyers we were, but he doesn’t hold that against us. He is now our close friend and he in fact even read at our wedding of nine years ago in November that was held outside at Pioneer Courage Park and Spirit of Nebraska, in the rain... He helped us buy our Gifford Park first house ever. But I had found it myself, after seeing more than one hundred homes for sale over a period of three years or so. But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. For now, all I had to do was to convince my fiancée from Belgium that Omaha was worth moving to, more so than Philadelphia or South Padre Island Texas where I had lived and worked before. I borrowed from the hotel the previous year’s Chamber of Commerce’s Omaha Visitors Guide, that year featuring a great picture of Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge on its cover, and heard for the first time the words Creighton University from a graduate in journalism who was the receptionist at the hotel, who let me take the Guide with me. I really liked her kindness and wishes of best of success when I explained that I needed the guide to sell my fiancée on the town.

The third time I encountered Omaha was the hardest. By December of 2010 I had signed the contract and was processing the HR paperwork remotely, from Abu Dhabi in fact where we were visiting, and our mind was set that I come to Omaha to work at Bellevue University, and that my fiancée would follow once I settled in here in Nebraska. I started work remotely and then flew in a few days into January of 2011 from Brussels, via Chicago. Sitting down for lunch I hear on the news that there has just been a shooting at a high school in Omaha, namely at Millard South High School. I was waiting for my plane to Omaha and I was moving there—well, here, really—with all my stuff in one suitcase and my carryon bag... What should I do? passed through my mind a few times, and I kept dismissing the question. I have made a commitment and that was it. Besides, I’ve dealt with the trauma of shootings before... for two decades as my Dad kept reciting the story on how “they shot at us” in New York City in 1968 at breakfast, lunch and dinner, and then dodging by just a few minutes a shooting in Pittsburgh early in the morning right around the corner from our house right between the every half hour university police cruiser patrols. I had just passed by that spot on my bike 5 minutes prior, returning from buying cigarettes... I’m still not certain if it was not simply inertia, or as we call it muddling through—we’ll see what happens—that determined my decision. **(continued on page 15)**

It was after all too complicated to undo that which was already decided, and to turn around and return to Brussels that day. I had made a promise to be physically at work in Bellevue Nebraska on Monday morning. That was it: I had to keep my promise. So I boarded the plane. Then if it couldn't get any worse, it did. I got lucky on the small commuter plane to Omaha, and I had one of the seats near the emergency exit window, so I got lots of legroom. The lady in the seat next to me seemed very nice, and in fact I was looking forward to great conversation as soon as I got to my seat, particularly as I noticed Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* sitting on her seat as she was placing stuff in the overhead compartment and was getting ready to sit down. In a book dear to me Ayn Rand describes the tribulations of an architect who was first told in school by his dean that he would never be an architect, and who then struggles really hard to make his unique style appreciated by an unappreciative inertial and internally corrupt professional society yielding to the powers of monopoly of controlled thought over society and art and culture alike. But he wins, and along with his win the power of creative novel ideas doesn't lose in the world. Imagine thus my hope for great conversation as I take my seat and I wait for my neighbor to also take hers, and as we introduce each other. As she learns why I was flying to Omaha she then says, fully honest and matter-of-factly "we don't like to let new people come here." "Wow," goes through my head. It connects right away with the news on the school shooting of only half an hour earlier. "What am I getting myself into?" couldn't leave my mind for the remainder of the flight... I kept making small talk. We barely touched on the *Fountainhead*. At some point she may have said the word exception, somehow relating to me, but I had already disconnected for the most part, and the after the fact realization of the gaffe was not going to impress me at all anymore. The impression stuck. I ploughed ahead nonetheless, because I had made a promise.

The fourth, and final, time I encountered Omaha was for good, and everlasting. Job was going on well. My fiancée visited a few times. We got married in November 2011. After two years of searching and almost one year of wait after we put the offer in we got our little house in Gifford Park neighborhood in August 2013. Everyone's been reading stories here since. We got to Save Yates once, help organize 33rd Friday a few times, and help vision and design an elementary school. Moved the needle a little on Midtown Neighborhood Alliance. I learned how many potatoes you can grow on a tiny children's plot at the community garden, I watched the *Goonies*, I bought a bike and fixed a bike at the Bike Shop, and I became

addicted to great bacon and to buying things at the Gifford Park Neighborhood Market. In fact so addicted to the market, that we wanted to make one or more in the winter at Yates too. I learned so many other things. Painted a ceiling. Fixed plumbing. Took part in and spoke at Restore Omaha. Learned about and met Tom Mangelsen and his Photography Gallery. Went to Law School even. Come last November, of 2019, we were asked to Save Yates a second time. As Mike Caban's old baseball hat says, "Life's good." Ah, that too: I learned from Chad to listen to Guy Raz and his "How I built this?" podcast, including the "Life's good" one, and the story of trademarking that phrase... check it out—it's a great story with a friendly attorney. We even met Bob Yapp, but only after having visited Hannibal Missouri and white washed the fence all together as a family. Was about time for my daughter who as a young child read Tom Sawyer as her first ever chapter book.

Even Octav came to visit Omaha again one day. After all we were here. He announced himself a few hours before, from St. Louis Missouri, and got in his rental car there and simply stopped by for the night. It was great to see him. We told stories. We told him the story in its entirety, ever since I had left Philadelphia for Brussels in 2009. Of course we'd stayed in touch daily over all this time, but it's a different thing to get a feel of the neighborhood and neighbors and share all of our GPNA newsletters and stories with him, and pictures and everything (nothing about the smell? although we have chickens in the neighborhood... ;-). Plus the feel of our old house with nice wood door frames and inner stairs, and small rooms... He barely had a few minutes to catch us up on how his helicopter-making company is doing. But he did get a chance to mention he was looking for a plane engine for his 3D printed plane he was going to make... I'm proud of him. I never smelled manure on the way to Lincoln. I biked in Omaha though and it's not flat at all... When you're an aerospace engineer...

We learned the other day that Octav bought a plane. So I asked. By June he'll be here with it. He's planning to stop by in Lansing to pick up his "daughter/sister," and bring her over for holiday too. It's a four-seater plane for a reason, after all. Once the "kids" are here, all four of us will be able to explore the area by plane, pulling a big Save Yates banner. And Omaha, and Gifford Park, are such attraction points that you can never stay away from them for too long... Unless, of course, you're here already. In which case, you're already the luckiest in the entire world.



Gifford Park Neighborhood Association
 PO Box 31462
 Omaha, NE 68131

Place
 Stamp
 Here

**Gifford Park Neighborhood Association
 Membership Application**

The GPNA membership year runs from January 1 to December 31.

Type of membership: ___ Single (\$10) ___ Family (\$15) ___ Business (\$25)
 Today's Date: _____

Business Name (if applicable): _____
 Business Phone (if applicable): _____

Name (1): _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____
 Name (2): _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____
 Name (3): _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____
 Name (4): _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____
 Name (5): _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Volunteer Opportunities! I'm interested in helping with...

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Call committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Holiday Banquet | <input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood Watch | <input type="checkbox"/> Tennis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cleanup/Beautification | <input type="checkbox"/> Landlord/Tenant Issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter Distribution | <input type="checkbox"/> Tool Lending |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Garden | <input type="checkbox"/> Memberships | <input type="checkbox"/> School Liason | <input type="checkbox"/> Tree Planting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easter Egg Hunt | <input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood Market | <input type="checkbox"/> School Activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Garden |
| <input type="checkbox"/> History | <input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood Walks | <input type="checkbox"/> Soccer | |

Return completed form along with check or money order to:
 Gifford Park Neighborhood Association, PO Box 31462, Omaha, NE 68131.