

PORTAGE PARK

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

News

AUGUST 2003

Meetings and Announcements

Portage Park Neighborhood Association

The next meeting will be held on **August 11TH, 7:30PM** at the Portage Park Cultural Center, 4150 N. Long.

- Association support of Portage Theater discussion.
- Milwaukee/Pensacola Development Presentation.

Attending members get a chance to win great door prizes donated by local businesses.

Jefferson Park Neighborhood Association

The next meeting will be, **August 28TH, 7:30PM** at the Jefferson Park Field House.

C.A.P.S. Meetings

Beat 1624 Next meeting is Wednesday, **August 27TH** at Biagio's, 4242 N. Central at 7:00 PM.

Beat 1633 Next meeting is Tuesday, **August 19TH** at Merrimack Park, 6343 W. Irving Park at 7:00 PM.

Beat 1634 Next meeting is Thursday, **August 28TH** at Belmont Craigin Library, 5108 W. Belmont, at 7:00 PM.

PPNA News Via E-Mail

If you would like to receive this newsletter in PDF format send a request to ppna_board@hotmail.com

PPNA On-Line

Log-on to for the most current info from the PPNA at www.portage-park.org

Look Inside!

Parents Coffee information can now be found on the bulletin board on page 5.

Developer to Present Condo Plans at PPNA Public Meeting

by Jerianne Garber

Construction of the condominium/retail complex at Milwaukee and Pensacola is on target to begin this month, according to developer Tom LoVerde of Mega Realty, Inc. Details of the design are scheduled for a presentation at the next Portage Park Neighborhood Association's public meeting on August 11th. LoVerde noted that PPNA played a significant role in the final plans and the design complies with the city's request for pedestrian-friendly retail complexes. "We definitely worked with (PPNA President) Adrienne O'Brien and (Economic Development Committee chair) Ellen Stoner to get their input," he said.

Delko, the construction company for the Mega Group, expects to build 25 condominium units in the new complex, comprised of three one bedroom/one bath, 19 two bedroom/two bath, and three three bedroom/two bath units. Up to six storefronts will also be featured at the complex's street level. Condo units will range from 983 square feet to 1,980 with the smallest unit prices starting in the low \$200,000. "We still haven't worked out the prices for the largest units," LoVerde said. Construction is expected to be completed in 14 to 18 months.

Community input is evident in several aspects of the project's plans. In response to a PPNA request regarding the height of the building, Mega utilized a four story design on the south end of the block, which tapers down to three as it adjoins the Klaffter building to the north. Another PPNA suggestion is reflected in the building's south corner storefront which is designed for leasing to a restaurant with outdoor seating. Additional building amenities include an elevator, 27 indoor heated parking spaces, and decorative fencing and landscaping. Another 13 ground level parking places will be offered off the alley behind the complex for patrons of the participating retailers.

After viewing the project's plans, Adrienne O'Brien commented, "I am thrilled to see this wonderful development come to our neighborhood. It will not only provide us with the density in quality residential that we need in our community but also retail space which may be able to provide us with an outdoor cafe or coffee shop, which is something many of our residents/members have been asking for". She also said it was a pleasure working with Delko Construction as - SEE DEVELOPMENT PAGE 3

La Peña Owners' Business Thrives on Successful Mix of Family, Friends

by Mark W. Anderson

Some people, it seems, just know how to face up to life's challenges and come out on top.

One of those people would have to be Jaime Fidel Castillo, proprietor of Le Peña Restaurant right here in Portage Park. Mr. Castillo, along with his wife, Maria, has not only made a go of opening a restaurant with an exotic theme on what was once a desolate dining stretch of Milwaukee, but has done so while rehabbing the building the business is located in, raising a family with some special challenges, and learning how to cook for a hundred people at a time.

The restaurant, located at 4212 N. Milwaukee, has garnered rave reviews in such publications as the Chicago Reader and the Chicago Tribune, and draws customers from around the city. But what may be even more inspiring

than the food is how the restaurant came to be, who works in it, and what it has come to mean for the Castillo family.

Like many immigrants in similar situations, Jaime came from his hometown in the central region of Ecuador to Chicago because he had a sister here. At the time of his arrival in 1992, when he was 27 years old, Chicago had a small Ecuadorian community, not like the 100,000 or so of his countrymen who now reside here. Upon arrival, he started working his way up the ladder in any job he could find: cleaning restaurants, parking cars, bussing tables. Soon, however, he got a job as a bus boy around the time the Red Head Piano bar opened on Ontario Street in 1993. Showing his abilities, he quickly became involved in other aspects of running the SEE LA PEÑA PAGE 2

Theatre Operators Look to Overcome Obstacles to Opening

by Mark W. Anderson

The new operators of the Portage Theater aren't giving up just yet, despite running into a number of obstacles that look to threaten their plans for the 80-year old property. Problems with zoning, city permits, and larger than expected costs have already delayed the theatre's opening once and look to cause problems for the immediate future.

The property, located at 4050 N. Milwaukee Ave., was taken over by a new management team earlier this summer after a failed attempt to turn it into a school for the recording arts. The new operators immediately announced ambitious plans for the location, including children's theatre, a mix of classic and second-run movies, and marionette productions, among other events. An opening date of July 25th was announced, complete with an expected showing of the classic film "Gone with the Wind", but that date was pushed back. Another opening date isn't expected for at least two months.

Paul Warshauer, general manger of the theatre, points to issues such as lapsed zoning, expired business licenses, and needed repairs to the air conditioning system as playing a big role in pushing back the opening date. "Technically, the building had no zoning," Warshauer said, "because the zoning designation had been allowed to lapse. So the zoning was bad, but we got it fixed. Now we can move onto other things, like the business license."

Such problems don't mean, however, that progress isn't being made. Terry Boyke, an aide to 45th Ward Alderman Patrick Levar, has been working with the operators to meet the requirements of the city, and a new opening date of October 1st is currently scheduled. As well, progress is being made on the inside of the theatre, as seats in the smaller of the two screening rooms have been steam-cleaned, lighting has been replaced, and years of neglect is starting to be washed away. An architectural firm has reportedly been selected do the restoration and build-out of the theater, a contract has been signed with the Chicago Kids Company theater group to occupy one of the proposed spaces, and the air conditioning has been fixed. Meanwhile, the popcorn machine is being replaced, while the film cases containing "Gone with the Wind", direct from the Warner Brothers, wait to be opened.

But beyond the legal requirements of the city, whether or not Portage Park residents will see a film on the theaters' big screen any time soon depends a lot on money. Mr. Warshauer is, in part, turning to the community to help him get the doors open and the project off the ground. He reports that the investment group behind the new managers has already spent more than they were expecting to, and future funding is currently up in the air. He has approached a number of community groups, including the Portage Park Neighborhood Association, about ways to team up and raise funds, SEE THEATRE PAGE 3

LA PEÑA business, such as setting up the bar, hiring the help, and picking out the furniture, and later moved up to full-time manager.

Despite his training as an engineer in his home country, Jaime had his eyes set on opening a restaurant almost from the time he came to the U.S. By 1993, the plan for a restaurant – and a new family - started to take shape. At a party thrown by his sister in 1993, Jaime met his future wife Maria, who lived in Portage Park. Maria was a foster parent to a young boy who had been born premature and then abandoned at the hospital. Jaime and Maria starting dating, with Jaime letting Maria in on his life's ambition. She, meanwhile, let him in on her desire to adopt the child she had been caring for, who was soon to reach the age when he would require adoption or resettlement. Putting the pieces together, they married, and brought their son, Malcolm, into the family.

And then it was time to get the restaurant going. After looking at over a hundred different buildings as possible restaurant locations, they settled on a four-unit apartment building on Milwaukee. However, rehabbing the building's run-down apartments, turning the medical clinic on the ground floor into a restaurant space, and finding the necessary money proved a challenge. Selling their homes and doing much of the work themselves, Jaime and Maria, (who was pregnant with their daughter, Grace, by this time), moved into the building and started tearing it apart by hand. Calling on a wide range of friends and fellow immigrants Jaime had helped get jobs in the past, including architects, plumbers, and electricians, they slowly turned the place into exactly what they needed.

To keep costs down, and because she was such a good cook, Maria was chosen to handle the cooking duties. Realizing the size of the task ahead of her, she brought her mother to Chicago from Ecuador to help her, and Jaime got some professional chef friends to help design the kitchen. Carpet laid, equipment installed, and windows washed, they were ready.

On the day they opened, people were standing outside the door waiting to get in. They ran out of food that day, but the dream had turned

true at last. That evening's celebration lasted long into the night, despite the next morning's scheduled opening time of 11:00 AM. When they got to the restaurant half an hour before open, however, there were even more people waiting on the sidewalk and not enough time to prepare all the things they needed to feed them. "That was the only time I saw my wife ready to quit" Jaime says, shaking his head. "We learned right away you need more than half an hour a day to prepare for your customers."

But, judging from the success of Le Peña today, the Castillos learned their lesson well. More important to Jaime and Maria, though, are the importance of making time for family despite their busy schedule. As a young African-American boy of nine in a family of Ecuadorians, Malcom faces a number of difficult challenges on top of the hyperactivity that comes as a result of being born premature. But Jaime and Maria make sure he has the time and attention he deserves despite their busy schedules. Grace, now four, is a bright, smiling girl who has obviously grown close to her older brother, running and laughing in the restaurant with him before it opens. For his part, Jaime counts his blessings, and his eyes open wide at the chance to talk about his family and his life.

"I love talking about this stuff," he says. "I realize I am very lucky, but I also know how much hard work we've put into it. We've achieved our goals." As such, their schedule has slowed down a bit of late. "My wife, she does the accounting now, which makes it a little easier on her, and helps make sure we always have time for our children." And if they don't, he says, there's always someone in the extended family to help out.

Which they may need, since Jaime mentions they're looking to open another location somewhere in Bucktown. "One more, and then that's it," he says, not all that convincingly. "One more, and then it's time to relax".

But no matter what obstacles might stand in the way, one gets the sense Jaime and his family will meet them – and, in the end, succeed.

The relaxation part? Now that's a different story.

PPNA, Economic Development Committee Look to Survey Community for Zoning Re-write

By Mark W. Anderson

In anticipation of community meetings slated to be held later this summer, the Economic Development Committee of the Portage Park Neighborhood Association is planning on undertaking a series of neighborhood surveys designed to collect information about what kinds of residential and commercial uses the Portage Park area currently has along its commercial corridors, and may need in the future.

As part of the ongoing process of re-writing the city's Zoning Ordinance, the meetings will be held in order for city planners to get recommendations for zoning based on the current reality of land use, trends of land use change, and future vision for land use. Utilizing a series of specific zoning designations, the re-written ordinance will guide usage and development for retail and residential development for decades to come.

"We want to be as prepared for this process as possible" said Ellen Stoner, Economic Development Committee chairperson. "We want to make sure we're not blindsided when the City makes its final zoning decisions."

In order to accomplish the survey, EDC members and volunteers expect to collect information on the types of buildings and their current use throughout the neighborhood's commercial corridors. After the information is collected, the EDC then plans to work with the community to both identify potential changes from current zoning and develop recommendations for possible future designations.

Chairperson Stoner has said that she hopes to follow similar efforts already made by the Old Irving Park Association (OIPA) as part of their plan to participate in the zoning re-write process for their community. OIPA is currently collecting such information as business use, residential type, parking availability, and general comments on the various residential and commercial areas of their neighborhood.

Volunteers are needed to help in the survey process for Portage Park. Area residents interested in volunteering to help PPNA in collecting community information can contact Ms. Stoner at (773) 427-5430.

DEVELOPMENT - well as the Alderman's Office on this project," and noted "this project gave all of us an opportunity to sit down and discuss the community's wishes and concerns with all parties and work out our differences, yet still achieve a wonderful end product."

The site formerly housed a trophy manufacturer and has been vacant for many months awaiting the recently approved zoning change by the City Council. Terry Boyke, 45th Ward aldermanic aide, said at the July 14 PPNA meeting that expectations are that Mega Realty will be issued construction permits by August 7th.

LoVerde said that Mega is planning a similar residential/retail complex for Chicago's south side. In the past, most of the company's leasing properties have been businesses-oriented, including industrial buildings, offices, and shopping mini-malls, such as Veteran's Square in Jefferson Park where the Mega Group has its headquarters.

THEATRE along with looking to arrange additional financing with a local bank. Meanwhile, a group of young people from the neighborhood who were working on renovating the theatre have been laid off. A number of private functions are scheduled for the coming months, which may help generate revenue, but such opportunities depend on the necessary permits.

Still, Mr. Warshauer, speaking for the new operators as a whole, expresses optimism. "Although it's taking a little time to weave our way through the city's maze," he said, "we are looking forward to opening. We know the neighborhood is excited about the project, and so are we."

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Garden Club Update

The next Garden Club meeting will be on Saturday August 23, at 9:30 AM. Call Gerard at 773-736-3076 for location and more information.

Environmental Events in Chicago

Check out the link below for the Department of the Environment web site. It is full of things to do in the city dealing with the environment, rooftop gardens, blue bags, migratory birds and the North Park Village Nature Center are just a few of the topics you can look into. A wealth of other environment related information is also on the site.

<http://www.cityofchicago.org/Environment/index.html>

Lawn Care

Annual white grub damage will begin to show up this month as browned-out areas of turf that pull back easily "like a carpet." Grubs chew grass roots, resulting in turf that lifts up. Minor damage is usually not cause for treatment. Pull back damaged turf and count grubs (white C-shaped larvae with black heads); 10 to 12 per square foot is considered enough to treat. Recommended chemical products vary in their application time. Many gardeners wait until the third week of the following June to apply imidacloprid. If possible, try to avoid using strong insecticides if damage is light. If treatment is necessary, apply to affected areas rather than entire lawn.

Information courtesy of Chicago Botanic Gardens.
www.chicago-botanic.org

The Irving Park YMCA would like to thank our community volunteers for their dedication and commitment to the Irving Park YMCA!

Ailish Montague
Alicia Romig
Ashely Bradshaw
Britt McClelland
Greg Borkowski
Jackie Ramos
James Eskew
James Fox
Jennifer Salas
Jennifer Ramos
Jody Tendler
Josh Kramer
Justyna Daszczyńska
Kandace Lenti

Kelly Cavers
Lulu Martinez
Maggie Biel
Maria Quinones
Maureen Merrigan
Meagan Houston
Megan Okoniewski
Michael Anselmo
Nastia Todorova
Priscilla Ramirez
Rachael Ohman
Tim Sterrett
Yesenia Garcia

It is with the continued support of volunteers- that the Irving Park YMCA can build strong kids, strong families and strong communities.

And while we are thanking volunteers... The PPNA would like to thank these people for helping out at the Independence Day Parade!

Kevin O'Brien
Jill Arena
Terra Schott
Joe Tshulos
Neil Krus
Roger Klose
Geri Renz
Eddie & Denise Cortes
Annette Baase
Abra Huskey

Joanne Berg
Francie Bulger
Leslie Grimm
Sue Regan
Aaron & Christine Fleming
Scott Goedert
Gary Bonikowski
Shelly Villalobos
Mather Cafe members

The parade was a great success due to your efforts. Thank You!!

New Board Member Joins PPNA

The Portage Park Neighborhood Association is pleased to welcome our newest member of the Board of Directors: Jerianne Garber.

Jerianne, a 28 year resident of Warner Avenue in Portage Park, currently teaches photography at Wright College and holds a BA degree in Journalism from University of Toledo and a masters degree in Photography from Columbia College. She will undertake the role of Senior Activities Director for the organization, and also expects to contribute her writing talents on behalf of the PPNA News (look for her article on page 1 concerning the Milwaukee/Pensacola development).

The PPNA Board is thrilled to have Jerianne on board, and looks forward to her enthusiasm, energy and leadership.

Please come to the August 11th public meeting and welcome Jerianne Garber to the PPNA board.

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Please bring a small treat to share.

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For questions or suggestions please
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Portage Park Neighborhood Association Financial Report
Balance Sheet As of June 9th, 2003

ASSETS

LaSalle Checking Account \$3,044.22
 Total Assets as of 12 May 2003. \$3,044.22

REVENUE April 14th to May 12th, 2003

Advertising Revenue. \$345.00
 Membership Revenue \$132.00
 Parade Donations \$1,070.00
 Total Revenue. \$1547.00

EXPENSES April 14th to May 12th, 2003

Newsletter Expense. \$740.00
 Miscellaneous Expense. \$30.62
 Parade Expense. \$211.00
 Total Expenses. \$1,045.62

Why Join PPNA Today?

Because together we speak loud enough to be heard. Through this newsletter, attendance of meetings with city officials, local businesses and other community groups we have, and continue to, establish a direction for our corner of Chicago. Join today or come to the August 11th public meeting at Portage Park find out more about the PPNA.

Here is the door-prize winner from last months public meeting:

\$25 Costco Gift Certificate - Geraldine Renz

Membership Application/Renewal Form

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Would you like to receive the PPNA News via e-mail? Yes

This is a New Membership Renewal

I would like to help with:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Development/Zoning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter Delivery | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Website Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Children's Activities |

Membership renewals are due January 1 and expire December 31

Mail form and check to: PPNA Membership, 4105 N Leamington, Chicago IL, 60641

Make your check payable to Portage Park Neighborhood Association

Membership dues: Seniors-\$6, Household-\$12, Business-\$20

August 11TH
Public Meeting Agenda

I. Call to Order - 7:30pm

II. President's Opening Statement

III. Secretary's Report

Minutes of the June meeting

IV. Treasurer's Report

V. Committee Reports

A. Garden Club

B. Seniors Club

Welcome Jerianne Garber.

C. Children's/Parents Coffee

D. Economic Development

1. Portage Theater seeks

PPNA support

2. Klee Building Update

E. Membership

F. Newsletter

G. Traffic

VI. Guest Speaker

Delko Construction to present

plans for Milwaukee/Pensacola.

VII. Public Announcements

The next public meeting of the neighborhood association will be on September 8, 2003.

VIII. Old Business

IX. Open Forum

X. Door Prize Drawing

LaSalle Bank Classic Film Series

August 9 - Double Feature

The Millionaire (1931)

The Finger Points (1931)

August 16

The Miracle Woman (1931)

August 23

Flesh (1932)

August 30

Murders in the Zoo (1933)

September 6

International House (1933)

All movies start at 8pm. General admission is \$5, seniors and under ten years \$3.

The theatre is located at 4901 W. Irving Park Road. For more information and updates call 312-904-9442

Summer Safety Tips

Stay cool this summer when the temperatures soar!

The heat and humidity can be dangerous to anyone, especially to infants, children, and older adults, or those persons who have disabilities and chronic health problems.

We want you to have an enjoyable summer!

Therefore, we are providing these safety tips for your continued well-being.

- Drink plenty of water and natural fruit juices to stay hydrated.
- Eat fruits, vegetables, and lighter meals to remain more comfortable.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol because they dehydrate the body.
- Reduce physical activity during the hottest part of the day: 10 am. to 3 pm.
- Always, wear a sunscreen of at least 15 SPF even on cloudy days.
- To be more comfortable, dress in loose, light colored, cotton clothing.
- Wear a wide rimmed hat or use an umbrella to protect your head and eyes.
- Keep shades drawn and blinds closed, but windows open for ventilation.
- Maintain good indoor ventilation by using an oscillating fan or air conditioner.
- If you take medications, ask your M.D. what precautions you should take.
- If you feel nauseated, dizzy, or weak during prolonged heat exposure, call 911. Sit or lie down to prevent fainting.
- Take frequent refreshing baths or showers to lower body temperature.
- To reduce your risk to the West Nile Virus: Use insect repellent that contains DEET and spray sparingly on exposed skin when outdoors.
- Wear clothing that will protect your arms, legs and ankles.
- Ensure that all windows and doors have tight fitting screens without holes.
- Make sure there is no standing water near your house resulting from overgrown bushes, bird baths, old tires, or other items that collect water.
- In Chicago, call 311 to request the locations of or transportation to a cooling center, if you cannot cool down during a heat wave.

We hope that these safety tips are helpful for more information or assistance call Mather Info Plus at 1-888-600-2560. We've got answers. Someone's here for you.

Local Women's Chorus Seeks New Voices

The Edge O' Town chapter of Sweet Adelines Intl. has moved to a new rehearsal/meeting location at the Irving Park Baptist Church, 4401 West Irving Park Road. This is a women's acapella chorus with 28 members singing four part harmony in barbershop style. They are seeking women of all ages who love to sing and have fun.

Those who appreciate music as audience members are reminded that rehearsals are open to guests. If you would like to visit, meetings are held every Tuesday evening at 7:30 p.m.

Their annual show will be at the new performing arts center at St. Patrick's High School on December 7th at 2:00 p.m. For more information call 773-777-5408

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FROM THE EDITOR

I have lived in the this area for over 8 years. Not as long as some, but long enough to have noticed some things both good and not so good about the neighborhood. I have been involved in the community since buying my first house on Grace Street. From cleaning up with the Clean & Green, to attending community and CAPS meetings, to walking door to door with my two children to deliver this newsletter each month.

Since being invited to become a board member of the PPNA almost three years ago and taking over the publication of The PPNA News, I have met residents, business owners and public officials. Some have impressed me to no end and some leave me wanting. I have seen the area prosper in many ways and decline in others.

The PPNA has, in a relatively short time, become one way for the community to begin to guild its own destiny. And this newsletter has been a big part of that empowerment. But, there is much more to do.

Every month 4000 copies of this newsletter are sorted and distributed to some 50 volunteers who deliver them door-to-door. The production is paid for by local businesses in the form of advertising revenue and the content is written, collected and organized by even more volunteers. It is a true community effort that gets this into your hands every month.

What is missing in these pages is the voice of that community. This is something the PPNA would like to change starting with this issue. Every month we will reserve space to print your thoughts, issues, praise, and concerns about life in Portage Park. We are calling it "Have You Noticed???"

This first column is straight from me, John Arena, and no one else. So now you know who to complain to if you don't like what you read or buy a beer for if you do.

Have you noticed anything that needs more noticing? Send it to haveyounoticed@hotmail.com and each month we'll all compare notes.

-- John Arena

Have You Noticed???

There has not been an announcement from the Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD) concerning the Klee Building Redevelopment plan. Word is that there have been some personal changes at the DPD. This could be contributing to the delay. But if it's because they can't decide which of the two massive, overbearing, conventional "retail" proposals would create the most traffic jams at Six-Corners, then they should take my advice and go with the pedestrian friendly Klee Arts Center proposal. Hey, if it works down the road at Milwaukee and Pensacola why not at Six-Corners where the stores need a little more foot traffic and a lot less auto traffic?

The eyesore of a building at 4939 W. Irving Park Road (the long closed auto parts store), which is owned by the bank to the east, is a little bit less of an eyesore these days. Shortly after VP Villalobos made some inquires about the owners intentions for the property they spruced it up. Well it's a start, but I would like to see some bigger thinking from a business with such a high profile in the area. A development in that location would be a nice match to the Klee, which is going to happen any time now. Right?

A recent article in the Nadig Press (July 30th) letting us know that Milwaukee Avenue is all torn up. Thank goodness they straightened me out on that. I thought someone put square wheels on my car, and all those big rigs were gearing up for a heavy equipment operators reunion. I'm no chef, but news is best served warm.

The Portage Park Neighborhood Association News is a publication of the PPNA. PPNA Board Members are:

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