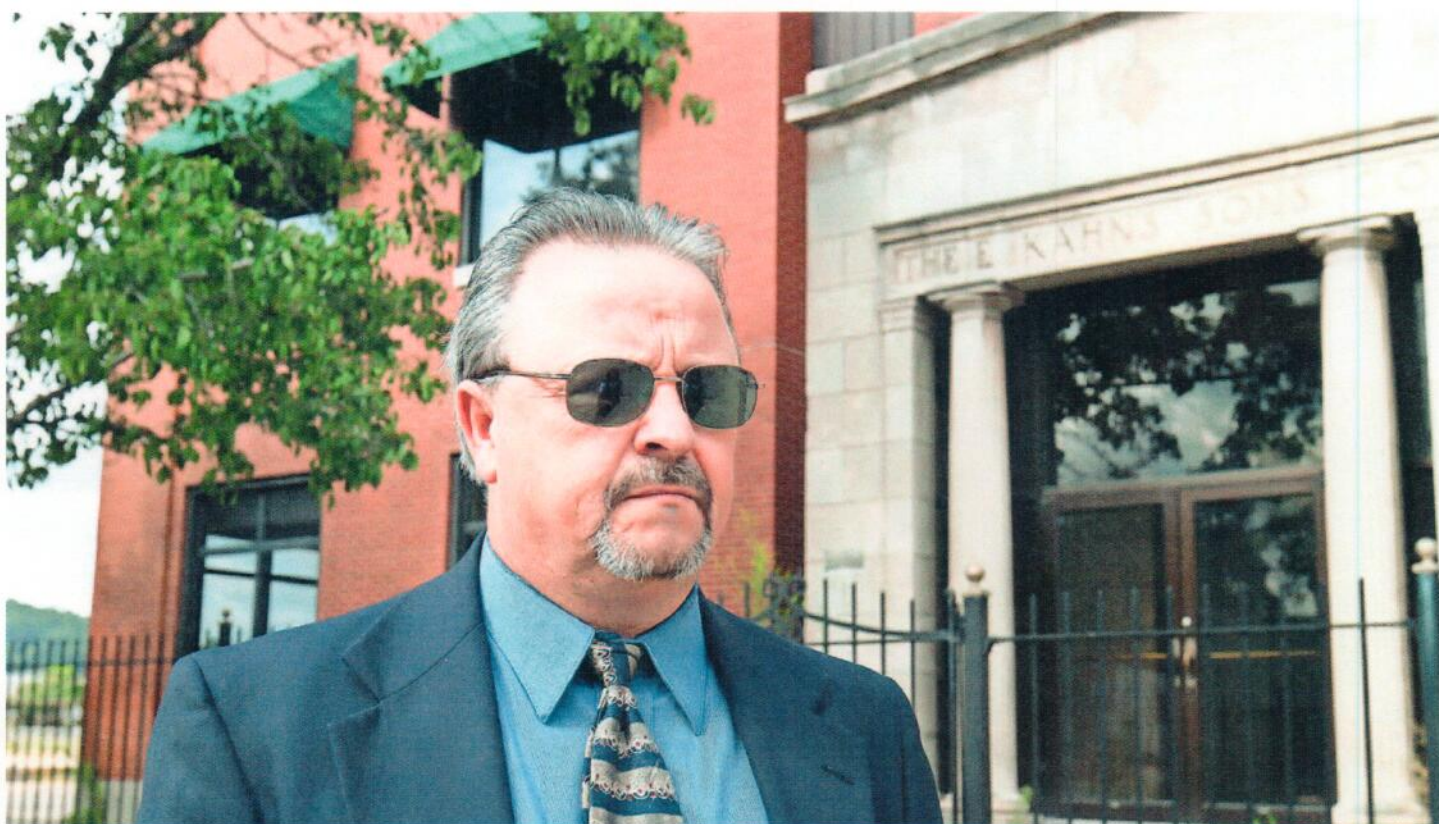


good news + communities

Camp Washington rehabs houses and grows food in urban garden



THE ENQUIRER/CARA OWSLEY

Joe Gorman, Camp Washington community organizer, stands in front of the old Kahn's Factory in Camp Washington in 2008. The vacant plant is currently being heavily marketed as part of revitalizing Camp Washington.

Its first winter harvest yields 25 pounds of bok choy and lettuce for Churches Active in Northside

By Gregory Flannery
Enquirer contributor

As the Camp Washington Community Board prepares to celebrate its 40th anniversary, its list of successes includes dozens of houses rehabbed, new homeowners welcomed and GEDs awarded to residents.

"We've been able to do a lot with

just a few staff and a variety of volunteers," says Joe Gorman, community organizer with the board. "We've been able to attract new families, some young families."

And a pair of helpful mules.

The mules are part of the new Camp Washington Urban Garden, situated on 2 acres that formerly housed the Cincinnati Workhouse, now the site of the River City Correc-

tions Center.

"We got a five-year lease from Hamilton County for the Camp Washington Urban Farm," Gorman says. "We're growing food for our local food pantries."

The first winter harvest yielded 25 pounds of bok choy and lettuce for Churches Active in Northside.

"We now have two donkeys there to chew the grass and weeds," Gor-

man says. "They're also contributing to the compost" by doing their daily business.

In addition, the farm has given community service opportunities to prisoners at River City.

"They have built our donkey house," Gorman says. "They put the tool shed together."

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"They've done some planting. They've done some harvesting. The director says the guys and gals love it."

Last year the Camp Washington Community School re-opened, hiring Anne Skove to work with high-school dropouts who want to earn their GEDs. That task is more difficult now that the state has raised test requirements and instituted a \$129 fee for each student.

"It's a dramatic change," Gorman says. "It's all online now."

'They clean it up'

But the most significant accomplishment for the Camp Washington Community Board in its first four decades has been improving 52 neighborhood houses. Many of the houses were built in the 1890s, and more than a few had become vacant eyesores, according to Paul Rudemiller, executive director.

"We value homeownership," he says. "We take a building and gut it out."

The organization acquired seven homes through lawsuits declaring them public nuisances, which were rehabbed and sold. Even if a lawsuit doesn't lead to receivership by the Camp Washington Community Board, it can induce negligent owners to make repairs, rather than risk loss of the property.

Last year the organization became the first to receive ownership of a house from the Hamilton County Land Bank. Scheduled for sale at a sheriff's auction due to unpaid prop-

erty taxes, the house at 3063 Sidney Ave. attracted no bidders. The Port Authority of Greater Cincinnati, which operates the land bank, took possession.

"(The landbank takes) a house that's got all kinds of liens and tax problems," he says. "They clean it up and provide a clear title."

"Before we rehab them, we find a buyer," Gorman says. "That way the buyer has an opportunity to help design the house. We've learned a few things about design ideas from potential buyers."

"Buyers love it," Rudemiller says. "They're designing their dream house."

Changes will continue

Much of the community board's funding comes from bingo. The organization also holds an annual golf outing, which last year generated \$16,000.

"All of that went to renovate structures," Gorman says.

The Camp Washington Business Association, operated by the community board, counts 150 companies in the neighborhood, 75 of which are members. While the neighborhood has just 1,400 residents, about 6,000 people work in the area every day, Gorman says.

One thing Camp Washington does not have, unlike some urban neighborhoods, is a lot of crime.

"Camp Washington has the lowest crime rate in District 5," Gorman says. "People here are not averse to calling the cops. There's good communication between the cops and the businesses."

The neighborhood has changed a lot since 1975, Rudemiller says.

"In the time I've been here I've



A pair of donkeys are among the newest residents of Camp Washington.

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seen so many meatpackers go down," he says. "Years ago it was kind of a stinky, smelly place with the stockyards."

The number of bars has declined from 25 to just one.

Peach trees, however, are flourishing. A former owner of three houses in Camp Washington used to plant the trees in her backyards. The urban farm now has 20 trees grafted from them.

"We're going to be growing a peach orchard," Gorman says. "Camp Washington has some great peach trees."

The changes continue. In addition to the 52 single-family houses purchased and rehabbed by the Camp Washington Community Board, 62 apartment units have also had makeovers. Next up could be the old Cros-

ley Building along I-75. Rudemiller and Gorman say an Indiana company plans to renovate it into 239 apartments. The 15-acre former Kahn's facility is also being heavily marketed, they say.

The community board is working on a strategic plan for the future, even as it marks ongoing successes.

"We've got a couple from Berkeley, Calif., coming to live here," Rudemiller says. "She's an artist, and he's in cinema."

"We're getting an influx of artists here," Gorman says.

After 40 years working in the neighborhood, how does Rudemiller see the community board's work?

"We're kind of rebuilding Camp Washington," he says.