MEMO TO Diane

F41 - re PR for
Rush City demolition
of houses.

Done 6/30/95 → – xc for Bryan + Marilyn Hartnett
– file Kammrich donations

FROM Debbie Mitchem

G-321

DSW 135616

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Frontpage

The East St. Louis Monitor

THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 1995

Monsanto Donation Helps Beautify East St. Louis

EAST ST. LOUIS - East St. Louis residents are taking the initiative to solve some of the problems that have emerged in many area neighborhoods over the years. Working with a $10,000 grant from Monsanto Company, Operation New Spirit, a citizen-run organization, will begin demolition of four abandoned buildings as it takes the lead in a city-wide effort to improve the community.

Beginning at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, June 7, contractors will raze the building at 1028 Mississippi St. - - the first of four abandoned homes along the western communities in East St. Louis that will be demolished as a part of the project. The demolition of the homes represents Operation New Spirit's latest efforts to beautify the city and make it safer for neighborhood residents.

"We began by working a lot in vacant lots and trash-filled alleys, and then many of the residents in the area came to us and voiced their concern about the problems caused by vacant, derelict houses," said Alandra L. Byrd, neighborhood organizer for Operation New Spirit.

"We want to remove the environmental blight caused by these abandoned buildings which present a whole gamut of problems in the neighborhood."

The problems associated with the vacant buildings have increased over the years as the buildings have deteriorated. One of the primary

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concerns of residents is that the crumbling structures create a safety hazard for area children who often play in them.

Some residents whose homes are next to the abandoned buildings have a hard time getting house insurance and the deserted buildings have lowered the property value of many of the homes in the area. Also, some residents have pointed to the abandoned buildings as potential sources of crime and drug use.

In 1993, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency started the Mississippi River Gateway Initiative, which focuses the resources of federal, state and local agencies on human health risks associated with problem areas such as these abandoned buildings. In the initiative, the U.S. EPA identified derelict and vacant housing as one of the primary threats to the health of area residents.

"The U.S. EPA historically has not dealt with abandoned homes, however, after hearing of these local problems, we found they fit in with the overall approach the Gateway Initiative takes toward community-based environmental issues," said U.S. EPA Public Affairs Coordinator John Perrecone. "Monsanto's involvement with Operation New Spirit is an excellent example of how government, industry and the community can work together in addressing local public health problems."

After spotting the original problem, Operation New Spirit administrators approached Monsanto, which has a manufacturing plant located adjacent to the affected neighborhoods, about funding a clean-up project. Monsanto's initial outlay of $10,000 has taken a step to make many residents' dreams of a better neighborhood a reality.

"We are part of this community and are committed to doing our share to help our neighbors meet their goals," said Russ Sackett, plant manager at Monsanto's W.G. Krummrich facility. "We want to take an active role in supporting organizations like Operation New Spirit which have had a great deal of success revitalizing the community from within."

According to Byrd, the efforts of Monsanto was the first company to listen. Monsanto was eager to help and they came to us and asked 'What can we do?'," Byrd said. "We hope that Monsanto's involvement will be a model for other companies and encourage them to become involved."

The private efforts of Operation New Spirit represent a trend toward increased civic-mindedness of the citizens and city officials alike. Following the initiative of Operation New Spirit, the city of East St. Louis hopes to begin a similar demolition program this summer that will target 20 additional vacant buildings in neighborhoods throughout the city, said East St. Louis city Press Secretary Calvin Jones.

Certainly, we see the work of Operation New Spirit as a positive step in the direction of alleviating some of the problems faced in these neighborhoods. Any demolition of vacant, derelict homes helps remove problems such as the inherent threat these homes pose to youth," Jones said. "Programs like Operation New Spirit's demolition can change the face of a whole neighborhood - - eliminating problems while making more positive aspects possible, like the development of new homes."

Three other houses, located at 1018 Paradise St., 1052 Paradise St. and 903 Sycamore St., will complete the Operation New Spirit project within 30 days of the June 7 demolition.

DSW 135617

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SECTION B

THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 1995

Cleanup

From page one

New Spirit say the cleanup not only will beautify neighborhoods but also will make them safer.

Karen Lumino coordinates the Mississippi River Gateway Initiative, which helped get the residents and Monsanto together. She said the derelict buildings — which attract mosquitoes, rats and trash — can be dangerous to residents' emotional and physical health.

Lumino said East St. Louisans "try to keep their lots up and have gardens and flowers, and they take such pride."

More demolition projects will begin this summer. The city plans to raze 264 more homes, said Dale Cook, with the city's Community Development Block Grant department. St. Clair County plans to raze hundreds of others.

In the Rush City neighborhood, the old Pilgrim Green church held many memories for Doris Kimble, a church trustee. But she welcomed the rubble's being cleared away. The congregation already has moved to a new church building on Caseyville Avenue, she said.

On Sycamore and nearby streets, many residents say they're working hard to keep up their homes and keep out the criminals. On Saturdays, Donnell Lewis, 42, Tommy Dancy, 70, and others in the neighborhood group clean up the vacant lots. But they've been frustrated by the derelict buildings.

Inez Gavin, who joins the Saturday cleanups, was heartened by the arrival of the bulldozers. "Once they get it cleaned up, we will keep it cleaned up," she said.

East St. Louis Effort Will Erase Eyesores

By Margaret Gillerman
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Ever since the old Pilgrim Green Baptist Church caught fire about five years ago, the burned-out shell has remained standing in the weeds at the corner of Mississippi and Sycamore streets in East St. Louis.

Next door, an abandoned gray house is shrouded in tree-sized weeds; one wall is falling off and creaks in the wind. Nearby, a small, scorched building is scrawled with graffiti.

Soon, these and other abandoned buildings in the Rush City neighborhood will be gone. Bulldozers began rolling Wednesday.

Lubirbia Rogers, 83, watched the contractors begin to knock down the neighborhood "eyesores."

"I got some close to my house that need to be cleaned up too," Rogers said. "I'm glad they got started."

One by one, about 1,600 abandoned structures will be razed as part of an effort to clean up East St. Louis. The demolitions have the support of city, county, state and federal governments, local industry, the Land of Lincoln Legal Aid Service — and the neighborhood groups of East St. Louis, which have complained about the blight for years.

The Rush City cleanup came about because of the efforts of neighbors, Operation New Spirit, which is a coalition of neighborhood organizations, and industry working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Monsanto Co. has donated $10,000 to tear down five buildings.

Venessa Marion and Alandra Byrd of

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