file: Krummrich

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

June 8, 1995 Page 1B

No Sites For Eyesores In E. St. Louis Cleanup

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 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.

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.

DSW 135654

STLCOPCB4035632