



Sister Ann Fleming (left), of the Farmington Hills-based Sisters of Mercy order, project leader Woody Boydell and architect Shirley Smith, a 1971 Mercy High School graduate, look out windows of the 7-apartment building in Detroit they are helping to renovate.

The rehab spirit

City dwellers, suburbanites roll up their sleeves

By Casey Hans
staff writer

THE REHABILITATION of an old Detroit apartment building has rejuvenated the spirit of city dwellers and suburbanites alike who have worked on the project since last year.

Many people, including a 38-year-old Rochester woman searching for a new career, a Mercy nun with an urban calling who lives in the city, and an architect who graduated from Mercy High School and designed the rehab project have played important roles in reviving the 74-year-old

structure on West Grand Boulevard.

The 3-story brick building is being renovated by a group called Core City Neighborhoods and will be used as a shelter and training ground for families as part of the Coalition on Temporary shelter, or COTS.

"This project has done wonders for me,"

said Theresa Cusumano, the Rochester resident who said the project has been her therapy since losing her paralegal job. "Because I'm unemployed, it's great therapy for me."

"It reminded me of who I am. It gives me a lot of joy."

Cusumano became aware of the project through the St. John Fisher Chapel, a Catholic parish on the Oakland University campus founded to serve the university community.

ARCHITECT SHIRLEY Smith, a 1971 graduate of Mercy High School in Farmington Hills, took a professional interest in the project, but soon developed a personal interest as well. She has spent many hours working in the building with her sleeves rolled up.

"We have a very, very strong interest in housing, especially housing for the poor. There's a real problem out there," said Smith, an architect with the Royal Oak-based Garner, Cousins & Associates Architects.

"We did our job and have stayed involved. There is not a lot of this going on in Detroit. This is really breaking ground for

more, we hope. This is starting within the community."

The 1917 building on West Grand Boulevard had been abandoned for 12 years when Core City tackled the project. Volunteers took hammer and sledgehammers to the building in November 1990, and began the renovation in March.

Core City started as a sort of block club 5-6 ago by members of the inner west side Detroit community, including two sisters from the Farmington Hills-based Sisters of Mercy Order. The group continues to encourage the upkeep of neighborhoods.

They have renovated vacant lots, single family houses and a few small apartment complexes, but the West Grand Boulevard building is the first major apartment renovation for the group.

WOODY BOYDELL is the Core City project manager and social worker who Smith calls "the glue that holds this all together." Boydell said he became involved with the group with the intent to help and not fully help people. "I wasn't able to provide some basic needs," he explained. "If someone doesn't have a place to live, it's hard to work on self-esteem issues."

The project has also helped the self-esteem of the neighborhood.

Individuals or groups interested in volunteering for a project can call the Core City Neighborhoods office at 894-8431.



This is the 1917 brick building on West Grand Boulevard in Detroit that is being renovated for homeless families.



photo by SHARON LaMIE/DETROIT Free Press staff photographer

Project director Woody Boydell works with Rochester resident and project volunteer Theresa Cusumano in the West Grand Boulevard apartment building. Volunteers from throughout the Metro area are spending Saturdays getting the building ready for occupancy by seven families.

police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police incidents, fire calls and court cases reported during the past week:

• AUTO THEFTS

Four thefts from vehicles parked in the city of Farmington over the weekend netted thieves more than \$2000. Two incidents occurred in the Holstire area and two others on

Smithfield in the Chatham Hills subdivision:

• golf clubs and a radio valued at \$600 were reported stolen from a car parked on Leelanau June 27.

• a purse and its contents and jewelry valued at \$925 were reported stolen from a car parked in the Orchard-10 Center.

• CDS, a wallet, cash and a radar detector valued at \$498 and a tape player valued at \$200 were reported stolen from two different vehicles parked on Smithfield.

• SUSPICIOUS FIRE

The cause of a fire at an abandoned building on 12 Mile, west of Drake, just after 2 a.m. Friday is considered suspicious, according to a Farmington Hills fire report.

Firefighters were called to the scene on a report of smoke in the area. They found a fire in the building next to a dentist office at 37325 12 Mile. Firefighters found multiple points of origin for the fire in the building. No significant damage was caused.

• CAR FIRE

Damage was estimated at \$1,000 after a fire broke out under the hood of a car driven by a Royal Oak man, on northbound 1275, south of 9 Mile, according to a Farmington Hills fire report.

Firefighters were called to the scene on a report of smoke in the area. They found a fire in the building next to a dentist office at 37325 12 Mile. Firefighters found multiple points of origin for the fire in the building. No significant damage was caused.

• TICKETS ISSUED

Three of four Novi teens found in the Oakwood Cemetery on Grand River after hours were ticketed for

trespassing, June 28. The two 19-year-olds, one 17-year-old and one 15-year-old who entered the cemetery at about 1:45 a.m., told police they were "looking for the area where the car would roll uphill," an old wives tale from the area.

The four were caught when someone reported hearing screaming coming from the cemetery area.

• HUB CAP THEFTS

At least nine cars lost their hub caps and wheel covers to thieves June 27-28 at the Green Hills Apartments complex, south of Nine Mile, between Gil and Halsted, according to Farmington Hills police reports.

Value of the hub caps ranged from \$100 to \$1,000.

• GREASE FIRE

Heat from a gas-fueled kitchen equipment ignited grease on a kitchen range unit at McDonald's restaurant, 38425 10 Mile, early Saturday morning, according to a Farmington Hills fire report.

When firefighters arrived they found the restaurant's sprinkler system had extinguished the small grease fire but a fire was still burning behind the unit.

Damage was estimated at \$1,000.

• BARBECUE FIRE

Firefighters found that the fitting entering a barbecue had failed, causing the barbecue to catch fire. When firefighters arrived at the house on Bella Vista Friday, they turned off the gas and extinguished the fire with a garden hose. Damage was estimated at \$300, according to a Farmington Hills fire report.

Firefighters were called to the scene on a report of smoke in the area. They found a fire in the building next to a dentist office at 37325 12 Mile. Firefighters found multiple points of origin for the fire in the building. No significant damage was caused.

• THEFTS REPORTED

A gold necklace valued at \$750 was reported stolen from a glove compartment of a car parked at Arden Drugs, 33391 Farmington Road June 15.

An AM/FM cassette radio valued at \$200 was reported stolen from a 1985 Oldsmobile at the Robert Bosch Corp., 38000 Hills Tech Drive, June 28.

An AM/FM cassette radio valued at \$600 was reported stolen from a

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