

## Residents and business leaders unite to revitalize nearby Eastwood

Downtown 6-4-84

By Jeannine M.E. Klein

Many of Houston's inner city neighborhoods have undergone a revitalization or are doing so now. One that appears on the edge of phenomenal redevelopment is Eastwood, in the near East End.

Only two miles from Downtown, many of the street names in the neighborhood—Polk, Dallas, McKinney—are eastward extensions of Downtown streets, providing easy orientation.

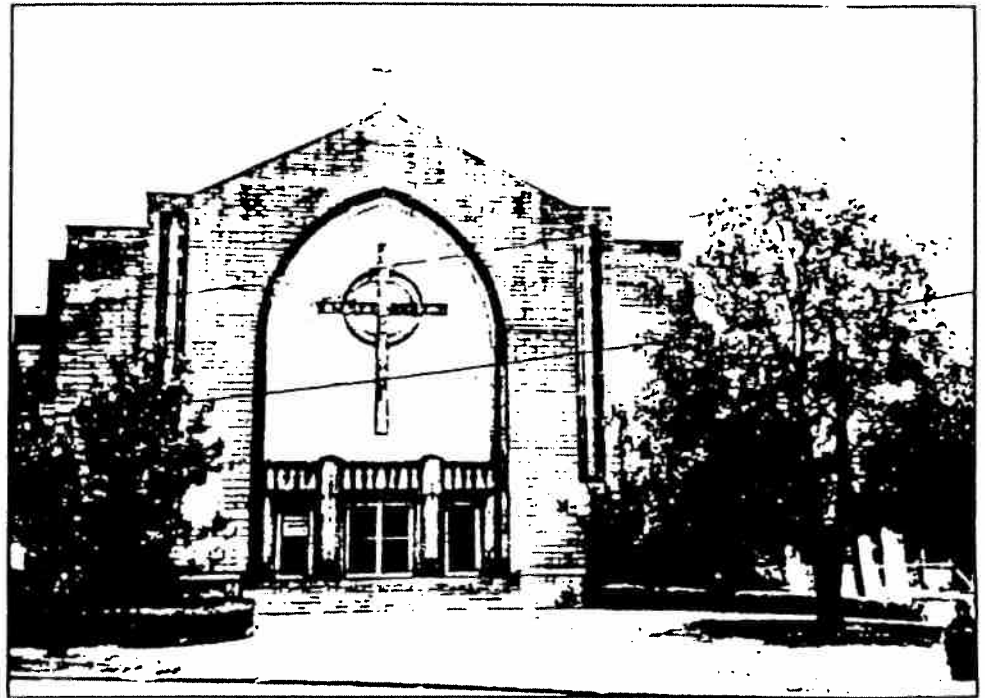
There is a contingent of enthusiastic business leaders and residents determined to restore Eastwood.

Some of its advocates are representatives of large corporations such as Tenneco and Southwest Bancshares. Others are religious, people determined to share with their neighbors. Indeed, it begins to appear there is a secret pot of gold buried in Eastwood, a lodestone that makes its salvation so important to many varied interest groups.

Strictly speaking, Eastwood is a small subdivision that runs from Sidney to Dumble, and from Rusk to Hardy. Like the words "Montrose" and "the Heights" however, the name has become an umbrella designation for a larger area that includes other subdivisions, from the tiny Dorruth Court, consisting of four lots, to the larger Broadmoore and Woodside. Perhaps 20 subdivisions are included in the casual use of the name "Eastwood", encompassing an area from the Gulf Freeway to Harrisburg, and from Milby to the HB&T railroad track.

Eastwood originally was part of Harrisburg, a small town that originated with an 1824 land grant from the Mexican government to John R. Harris. Spreading from the junction of Buffalo and Brays Bayous, Harris founded his burg. The fortunes of the Civil War, the laying of railroad lines and the digging of the ship channel eventually fostered the growth of the newer city of Houston, which overshadowed Harrisburg and which annexed the older city in 1926. Today, most Houstonians know "Harrisburg" only as a street name for the eastern end of Texas Avenue.

Some of Harris's spirit still lives in Eastwood, in members of families who have been there most of the century. William C. (Bill)



The Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, 4411 Dallas, became famous nationally for the programs it formulated to deal with white flight. The controversial rector who inaugurated "charismatic communalism" has left the East End Church, but Redeemer is still an active force in East Side community life.

Glaw is one with family roots in Eastwood extending back to the early 1900s. His grandfather, William Carl Gaylor, founded the family homestead at McKinney and Cullen, with the family company, Gaylor Oil, nearby. When Gaylor's daughter Rhea became Mrs. Rogers, he gave her a lot on Leeland as a wedding present. She lived there, in one of the first houses built on the street, until her death a few years ago. Glaw himself has moved his residence in and out of the neighborhood as he passed through various periods of his life, but says he has always worked in the Eastwood area.

Bill Glaw says he has always had faith in the neighborhood.

"I think that the East End is getting ready to really boom. It's doing just what Montrose and the Heights did." For confirmation of his prediction, he points out that "in most other areas, houses are going at or below their appraised value; here, it's appraised value or better."

Glaw acknowledges the East End's recent problems with an influx of illegal aliens, but says a campaign to control illicit immigration has had visible results in the East End. "I've seen a change. I know we still have some, but nothing like it was five years ago. Then, on any Friday or Saturday, you would hear gunshots all night."

He continues on a more upbeat note. "In two years, we have seen people taking more pride in the area, with more middle-aged and younger professional people moving in. It's a great opportunity: you can still buy a three-bedroom brick home in Eastwood for \$60,000 to \$70,000."

A three-bedroom, two bath house on a lot and a half was sold last year for \$87,000. Situated on a corner, the frame house has a front porch, a two-car garage with an apartment over it. The owner says the house may have been overpriced, because a similar house nearby was reported to have sold a few months later for \$79,000.

According to Glaw, the neighborhood's lowest ebb was in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when longtime, stable residents began to flee the inner city. But in the middle and late 1960s there was a singular and controversial movement in Eastwood. The phenomenon was centered around the local episcopal congregation.

It began in 1963, when W. Graham Pulkingham became rector of the Church of the Redeemer. In his book, *Gathered for Power*, Pulkingham writes his assessment of the community upon his arrival there:

"During the '60s, an urban crisis was in full bloom in Houston's East End."

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## East End revitalization *continued*

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Thirty years earlier Redeemer Church had served an area of substantial middle-class homes. . . . Without ceremony, a wedge of black inhabitants thrust themselves from the center of the city due south, and a pie-shaped segment of whites became isolated between them and the encroaching Latinos to the northeast. At the bite of that piece of pie stands the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer. In the beginning it was called Eastwood Community Church, named for one of Houston's gracious old neighborhoods, but that name had finally become a contradiction. . . . Then, in its abandonment, the parish neighborhood was becoming tawdry and unkempt, an insignificant square of blocks, ten by ten, on the inner city's declining edge."

Pulkingham came to Eastwood from an affluent suburban church in Austin, and faced the challenge of an inner-city neighborhood with some chagrin. His eventual solution was radical and provoked shock and disapproval in some quarters. But it did contribute to a diminishing of "white flight" from the neighborhood.



William C. (Bill) Glaw says "I think that the East End is getting ready to really boom." His family has roots in the neighborhood extending back to the turn of the century.

What Pulkingham and others at Redeemer proposed was called "charismatic communalism." Basically, they felt it was their Christian responsibility to help their less fortunate neighbors, and that the only way they could truly reach out was by opening their homes. Eventually, some parish members who lived in the suburbs moved back to Eastwood, opening their homes to communal living, both with other members



This large house in the Eastwood area sold in a transaction between private parties for \$125,000. Real estate people in the area estimated that on the open market it would have sold for about \$185,000.

of the parish to conserve funds and energies, and with people in trouble, who needed 24-hour-a-day help.

Parish statistics from the foundation period, 1963 to 1971, are startling. In his book, Pulkingham states that, in 1963, "Parish enrollment was about 900 persons, of whom one-third were inactive because of their living situation in suburbs far from the declining parish neighborhood." Parish income then was less than \$40,000.

By 1971, he writes, the enrollment was 1,400, with a typical Sunday attendance of 2,200, and an income of \$220,000 for the year. "It . . . worked a reversal of the pattern of inner-city abandonment—about 150 families had moved into Houston's East End to be close to the church."

The Church of the Redeemer became famous. In 1969, *Time* magazine chose Redeemer was one of a handful of ministries they thought would be significant models for the new decade: "An Episcopal pentecostalist is having remarkable success . . . in Houston . . . Followers of the Rev. Graham Pulkingham have organized 16 experimental communes ranging from groups of working people to foster homes for parentless children . . ." CBS television gave nationwide exposure in 1971 in an hour-long documentary on the "liturgical way of life" being followed at Redeemer.

The notoriety and the way of life rekindled interest in the East End. Dick and Ivie Bird were one couple who came to stay.

"The Church of the Redeemer is the glue that held this neighborhood together," Dick

says. "It has been the focal point of the community for years. At one time, it was community living, with married couples who opened their homes to others. Now, it's much more of a neighborhood church."

Pulkingham has gone from the Church of the Redeemer now. He left in the mid 1970s to pursue a program of evangelism which works under the name "Fisherfolk," according to a Redeemer parishioner, Emily Watson. Mrs. Watson says that under its present rector, Ladd Fields, "the direction of the church has been toward a lot more involvement with the Hispanic community around here, especially with those newly come to the United States."

Although there are no more open households as before, there are "house churches" or groups of people who work closely together while living apart. "There is still a warmth of caring and sharing in our lives, although not in the same manner as before," she said.

Dick Bird was one of the founders of the Eastwood Civic Association. He says "The civic club really came out of a desire to meet the neighborhood at large, not on a religious basis, but as people with a common interest in the community." He says the Association now covers 3,000 homes and has a core of 250 active members.

Ivie Bird says "There's been an increase in the number of Hispanics in the Civic Association." She says that having elected officials such as Houston City Councilman Ben Reyes and State Representative

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# East End revitalization

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Roman Martinez living in the area makes other Hispanics more comfortable in civic groups.

Dick Bird says "There's been a tremendous amount of interest from the business community, and the feeling is that the East Side has been neglected and has a lot to offer. The new Convention Center, of course, is expected to have a tremendous effect on the area, with development of hotels and other support facilities."

As the convention center draws visitors, crime prevention will draw even more interest from the business community. But already crime control is a focus of the civic association. Dick Bird says "We still have crime, but at least we have some control over it. There is a CB patrol of civic association members who watch for problems and report crimes spotted to the police. The civic association members do not intervene themselves. We have recently convinced the authorities to begin a pilot program whereby the patrol cars in the district carry CBs that hook up directly to the patrol and save time in reporting."

Clean up projects have also been a priority. The Birds praise Hughes Tool Co. as a major underwriter of the neighborhood clean-ups. "There is a kind of esprit d'corps that draws people in," Ivis says. "Of course, it's not all altruism. If you can do anything to benefit the community, your property values go up."

"The biggest thing we've realized is that the more organized you are, the more influence you have," Dick says.

Another Eastwood resident, Alice Wood, echoes Dick's sentiments. "One reason

businesses are paying attention to us is that we've got a bunch of terriers over here; we keep pulling on their pants legs until they go along."

The Woods are among other young professional couples (she is a nutritionist; he is an electronics engineer) who have discovered Eastwood. They bought their first house in 1980 and are now negotiating for their fourth property in the area. When asked why four houses, Alice quips: "Because I never again want to do anything on a Saturday but go to Handy Dan!"

Answering seriously, she says "Real estate here is still barely affordable. It is the last untapped area inside the Loop. It takes only 10 minutes to get into deep Downtown, and that almost includes parking. We are near a tremendous interchange and inside a little box with every major highway easily at hand. It's prime real estate that somehow got forgotten until just recently."

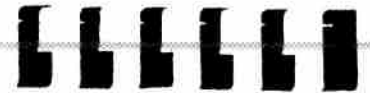
"The big question in this neighborhood," she adds, "is that there's a lot of rental property and the choices its owners make are going to be important in determining how the area goes."

Alice is vice chairman and staff nutritionist for the Eastwood Health Clinic, a private, nonprofit facility located at Telephone Road and Polk. Open just a year, it is a volunteer effort: doctors, lab technicians, nurses—as well as Alice—donate their time. There is a part-time paid administrator, but, says Alice, "she donates as much time as she is paid for."

Another brand of volunteerism is practiced by the East End Progress Association

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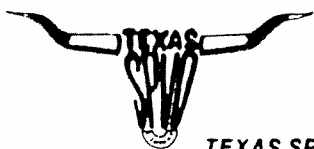
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(EEPA), founded by business leaders in the 1960s to serve the East End, an area larger than, but encompassing, Eastwood. EEPA roughly defines its province as Downtown to Loop 610, HB&T railroad, to I-45, with a few juts to take in important places such as the University of Houston's central campus.

Clinton R. Dunn, president, Texas American Bank Gulfway, is serving his second year as president of EEPA. He explains his involvement. "We—the bank and I—are involved because what's good for the community is good for the bank as well," a sentiment behind much of the corporate commitment to EEPA. "In general, there was a feeling that the area has a lot of good qualities, that it is not beyond saving. But we have an image problem in being perceived as a minority area."

Dunn also points to President Reagan's "dictum to the corporate community" to replace government support in community projects as an impetus to EEPA to be more effective. Companies like Hughes Tool, Brown & Root and Stewart & Stevenson became involved. "Not only do corporations give us money," Dunn says, "but also volunteers. And the people they place on EEPA's boards are not peons, they're vice presidents."

Like most organizations, EEPA has been more active and less so at various times in its 20-year history. It is now in an active period. Its commitment, coupled with the resurgence of East End civic associations, homeowner commitment and rising property values, may push Eastwood up from the category of "declining" into what is referred to as a "renaissance" or "revitalized" area.

The current energy is fueled by a report jointly sponsored by EEPA, Houston Council on Human Relations, Houston Chamber of Commerce, the mayor and City Council. Entitled "Innecity Revitalization and the Private Sector," the report begins with a look at innecity revitalization in other American cities. "We learned that . . . most innecity revitalization projects do not 'just happen'; rather, an extraordinary event or person must serve as a catalyst. Long-range frameworks are important in guiding revitalization, but they take second place to the catalytic happening.

Although not stated, the report seems to indicate that the group hopes to create this catalytic happening through implementation of its specific "site recommendations." There are 11 project recommendations for developers and government, which will require capital investment and 10 projects that do not.

Dunn points out the importance of community participation to keep programs aimed at revitalization from becoming ex-

clusively the domain of the private sector or of government, a course that has proved disastrous in other cities. The work, Dunn says, "is community based and oriented and involved. We're trying to service the community, and unless the people using the area are behind it, it'll never fly."

Community projects include the formation of civic clubs, crime prevention programs (such as Eastwood's CB patrol), and clear-up programs. Residents are in the process in several subdivisions of reinstating deed restrictions.

Participation of business is being sought. "First of all, our goal was to provide a master plan for innercity revitalization," Dunn explains. "In an older, rundown area, developers are not going to be interested without incentives. We are working with the City for development of a local tax abatement district. If City Council passes it, it would freeze taxes at the current, lower level for commercial enterprises that make improvements."

Some of the most exciting capital projects hoped for in Eastwood lie in the future. The abandoned HB&T railroad corridor is scheduled for conversion to a recreational parkway that would stretch from Downtown

near the new convention center to the ship channel.

According to Peter Armato, executive director of EEPA, negotiation is under way for a small train or buses to carry shoppers and tourists. The route would include the convention center, Chinatown, the proposed Mercado (an Hispanic community center), performance plaza, market stands, restaurants, a number of green space areas, and a park museum to be created near the termination point at Brady Island on the Ship Channel.

Along the way would be a commercial center at Harrisburg & Wayside. At a recent EEPA meeting, it was announced that a project is in its final stages of negotiation. The project centers on a Sears store at that location which closed last year. A local real estate development corporation, in cooperation with EEPA and other civic and governmental groups, proposes to turn the 1948 Sears store into a multi-purpose "retail center epitomizing public-private cooperation, that we anticipate will be a focal point in the area."

If all goes as planned and hoped for, the center at Harrisburg & Wayside would be

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# Opera will audition citizen singers for next season's productions

The Houston Grand Opera Association has announced chorus auditions for the 1984-85 season will be on Saturday, June 16 from noon to 4 PM; Sunday, June 17, from 7 to 10 PM and on Monday, June 18, from 5 PM to 10 PM. Auditions will be held in the rehearsal room of Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana.

Members of the Houston Grand Opera chorus are men and women from diverse professions. The chorus is made up of singers who participate in the Opera's full chorus season, as well as those whose jobs do not all a commitment to each production.

A new chorus member will earn about \$400 per production.

The 1984-85 season productions in which the chorists will participate are *Akkaten*, by Philip Glass; *The Flying Dutchman* by Richard Wagner; *Madama Butterfly*, by Giacomo Puccini; *The Magic Flute*, by Wolfgang Mozart; *Eugene Onegin*, by Tchaikovsky; and *La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi.

Singers auditioning should be prepared to perform two arias of contrasting style and tempo. Selections from opera are preferred, but judges will accept selections from oratorio works. Singers should be prepared to sightread.

For more information, call the Opera's production office, 548-0225.

# Planting project under way on Smith Street

Downtown commuters will enjoy a shaded drive along Smith Street in years to come thanks to Trees for Houston, a nonprofit group.

The project, spearheaded by attorneys Jim Rylander and Bill Coates, involved planting 120 live oaks along Smith from the Pierce Elevated to the Southwest Freeway during the last two weeks.

Rylander said last week that Smith Street was selected because it is so heavily traveled and because landscaping had stopped at Pierce.

This is the first Downtown project that

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H-Trees for Houston has participated in, although the group has cooperated with landowners in several Houston neighborhoods to plant trees, he said.

Rylander said the group wanted to call attention to the opportunity to turn Downtown Houston into a greenbelt. He said there are now several organizations which raise money for tree planting.

"This time is now," Rylander said. He and Coates arranged for a loan of \$12,000 to plant the Smith Street trees in order to gain momentum.

# East End revitalization

operational late next year. "We see this project as a catalyst of the redevelopment of East End," the announcement said.

Another group working in the East End is the Neighborhood Housing Service, a project of the Private Sector Initiatives group. Executive director Deborah Randolph says it is "a private nonprofit organization created to revitalize Houston's older neighborhoods in a partnership of City, residents and businesses."

Houston NHS is part of a nationwide network created by Congress. Randolph says purpose of NHS is to help area residents "secure financing, either through conventional means if they are bankable, or through our own special funds from the City and private monies from the insurance industry." NHS also sets up programs such as a "tool library" which will lend implements needed for gardening and home improvement.

"We're getting quite a lot of support from our community, unlike in other areas." She

cites donations for the office of land from Weingarten Realty, furniture from Prudential, a copy machine from Shell Oil and carpet from Tenneco. Fulbright & Jaworski donated legal services while Arthur Andersen & Co. volunteers do the accounting.

NHS's first project in the East End was the rehabilitation of a house in Broadmoor (see cover photograph) that had been not only an eyesore, but a challenge to law enforcement. NHS officials convinced the property owner to let the organization use the first floor as NHS offices in exchange for fixing up the property. The owner still can rent out the upper floor.

The EEPA, NHS, Eastwood Civic Association and Church of the Redeemer are all committed to revitalizing the East End. They cooperate admirably, with new projects from one group leading to the formation of another with some individuals serving on the boards of more than one group.

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