

Community Journal

A publication for Forest Park Southeast and surrounding neighborhoods

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The Gills Partner In Community Change

Forest Park Southeast is one of the city's most interesting and historic neighborhoods. During the years of general urban decline, Forest Park Southeast suffered more – and less – than many other neighborhoods. A large number of small businesses abandoned the neighborhood, but most left behind their empty storefronts as promises of future revitalization. Over the past several years, community-directed change has brought many new services to the neighborhood: reopened schools, better public transportation, more policing, and greater attention to replacing dangerous eyesore buildings and vacant lots with rehabilitated housing and newly constructed homes. Slowly but surely, Forest Park Southeast's residents are recovering our own history.

Two of the most enthusiastic proponents of reestablishing Forest Park Southeast's amenities are Amy and Amrit Gill of Restoration St. Louis. (*Restoration St. Louis continued on page 12*)



Before and After shots of an apartment renovated by Restoration St. Louis



Restoration St. Louis (cont. from p.1)

Pioneers themselves in the revitalization of the multicultural Skinker DeBaliviere neighborhood, the Gills seem to understand the importance of building upon a community's existing diversity and building stock, rather than replacing them with types of homes that price current residents out of their neighborhood.

Over the past year, Restoration St. Louis has bought more than 60 properties in Forest Park Southeast, most of them abandoned commercial buildings and vacant lots. Running contrary to the current condo craze, Restoration St. Louis has rehabbed empty buildings as rental apartments.

Their primary goal, says Amrit Gill, is to rebuild the existing neighborhood for its residents, rather than to "gentrify" it for newcomers.

"There will be some new faces, but we want our work here to be an example to other developers that a community's most irreplaceable strengths are its people and its buildings. With rare exceptions, displacement and demolition are better suited to theme parks than to neighborhoods," Gill said.

As proof of his intention, Gill notes that most of the more than 60 properties he and his wife have purchased have been vacant lots and shuttered buildings.

"We've bought the 'worst' ten percent of the neighborhood that no one else wanted," Gill said.

Over the next several months, the Gills say that they will concentrate on filling the commercial spaces and on preserving more of the neighborhood housing stock currently threatened by neglect and demolition. Already, popular Joe Boccardi's Catering and trendy Five restaurant are opening their doors in the neighborhood; and 02 Connect, a fast-growing Internet company, has begun unpacking its laptops and servers.

"Empty buildings and trashy lots are bad neighbors," Amy Gill said. "We're filling them up with great stuff."

Read more about Restoration St. Louis at www.restorationstl.com.

