

PHILADELPHIA NEIGHBORHOOD RECOVERY TOUR

TOUR STOP #7: ASSOCIATION OF PUERTO RICANS ON THE MARCH: HOUSING AND RETAIL VENTURES

CENTRAL LOCATION: 6th and Diamond Streets

Introduction

A community undertaking, with social services, new housing, and a retail venture, devised to repopulate a devastated neighborhood in eastern North Philadelphia.

Neighborhood Background

Germantown Avenue, a major commercial route since colonial times, cuts diagonally across the service area of a modern, nonprofit, community development corporation—Asociación de Puertorriqueños en Marcha (Association of Puerto Ricans on the March, known as APM). During the 19th and early-20th centuries, factories and shops lined this stretch of Germantown Avenue. Block after block of working-class row houses were built on the grid of streets that overlays the narrow old avenue.

Because Germantown Avenue had served as an economic anchor for the neighborhood, this community's struggle with 20th-century economic disinvestment was particularly difficult. By the 1970s, no major employers, institutions, or retailers remained in the community; and between 1980 and 1990, population dropped by 25 percent. Community demographics had changed during the late 20th century, as whites moved to other parts of the city or to the suburbs, and African-Americans and Latinos moved into this neighborhood. By 1990, 44 percent of the neighborhood population was Latino, compared with six percent citywide. The median income in the neighborhood was about half that of the median income citywide, and unemployment was high.

As businesses on the avenue closed and buildings were abandoned, the community was left with no center of economic strength. And what might appear to be easy accessibility to other neighborhoods is somewhat compromised: (1) The community is near Temple University, but is separated from the campus by a railroad viaduct; (2) Although the neighborhood lies between Philadelphia's two major subway lines, neither is within easy walking distance.

Development of the Venture

Founded in 1970, the Association of Puerto Ricans on the March (APM) has grown into a multifaceted organization that provides a broad range of services, including job readiness and drug-and-alcohol rehabilitation. Through a network of clinics and community centers, APM assists

an annual clientele of 2,500 people in eastern North Philadelphia. In addition, with a 200-person staff, APM is the neighborhood's largest employer.

In 1993, APM decided to stabilize the community through a strategic process. By assembling large parcels of land for new rental developments, this nonprofit corporation hoped that affordable housing would encourage people to stay in the neighborhood. The already established base of social services would prove to be essential for generating an economically stable population that could support redevelopment of the physical community. APM's housing program has received considerable acclaim.

This tour stop includes four sites developed by APM during the 1990s, after the organization adopted a strategic plan for neighborhood revitalization. APM proposed real-estate ventures that would improve the community by creating a critical mass of development and by establishing a link between housing and support services. Because the largest vacant sites could be found on or near Germantown Avenue, this two-lane-wide street became the focus of APM's development activities.

Jardines de Borinquen (6th and Diamond Streets), a 90-unit rental venture, is strategically located across from an elementary school. Archways and tiled roofs give this low-rise residential complex a distinctive Latin flavor. The design includes front entrances to provide a strong presence on the street, while an inner courtyard provides a secure play area, rear yards, and parking.

Further up the avenue is Hogar de Esperanza (2203 Germantown Avenue, at Dauphin Street), a midrise apartment building with 20 units of rental housing for people with AIDS and their families. The building also includes a Head Start childcare facility.

Adjacent to Hogar de Esperanza is Taino Gardens (6th and Dauphin Streets), a 42-unit development with two-, three-, and four-bedroom rental townhouses. In keeping with the city's policy of supporting new housing construction at lower density, the townhouses are semidetached (twins) with generous yards and room for parked cars.

Having brought more than 200 units of new housing into the community in less than a decade, APM was able to convince investors that neighborhood population had sufficiently stabilized and expanded to support development of a new supermarket. With assistance from the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia, APM assembled 111 small parcels of vacant land into a 3.5-acre site—large enough to accommodate a retail center with a 40,000-square-foot supermarket and associated parking and loading areas. One block of Germantown Avenue was closed off and integrated into the development site. APM secured \$5 million in financing from a number of public, private, and charitable sources. Brown's Thriftway (later Cousins Supermarket), the initial stage of the Borinquen Plaza retail center, opened in 1999. The first supermarket in the area in more than 30 years (and replete with Latino speciality foods), it created 75 new jobs for community residents.

APM has worked closely with Philadelphia Green, a program of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, demonstrating how "greening" can be used as a tool for neighborhood revitalization.

- In the book *Neighborhood Recovery*, John Kromer describes development activities of the Association of Puerto Ricans on the March (Chapter 2, "Advancing the Plan") and the value

of homeownership to Latinos and other minorities (Chapter 4, "The New Homeownership").
www.neighborhoodrecovery.com

- APM is discussed in *21st-Century Neighborhoods: Assets & Advantages of the Older American City*, a 38-page illustrated booklet available from the Community Design Collaborative (\$8).
- For information about real-estate development at APM, contact:

Director
Housing and Economic Development
Association of Puerto Ricans on the March
600 West Diamond Street
Philadelphia, PA 19122
215/235-6070 voice
215/235-7335 fax

- For information about Philadelphia Green, contact:

Philadelphia Green Public Landscapes
Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
100 North 20th Street, 5th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215/988-8800 voice
215/988-8810 fax
www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org/phlgreen

A Personal Perspective

Comments by Pamela Vu

Former Editor of Philadelphia Green News
Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

Condensed from *Philadelphia Green News*, a publication of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, July/August 1999.
www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org/phlgreen/index.html

When we think of housing developments, we tend to think of overcrowded high-rises with a limited landscape. But Philadelphia Green (PG), which is a program of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, and the Association of Puerto Ricans on the March (APM) set out to change the way residents of subsidized housing view their living spaces and neighborhoods. Jardines (pronounced har-DEEN-nis, it means "garden" in Spanish) is a model of the positive impact greening can have on communities regardless of their economic status.

For many years, the grounds of Jardines (located at 6th and Diamond Streets) were in disrepair. Residents struggled with maintaining the property from outside vandalism; plants were often trampled on and even stolen. It was not until PG teamed up with APM and the community that things started to change for the better. PG began work on Jardines in 1998. PG staffer Mark

Huber drew up a landscape plan for the common areas, surveyed residents, and came up with a cost analysis of the plantings. A landscape contractor was hired to do the cost estimate for the entire re-landscaping project.

Other PG staffers set up a design workshop in which residents could decide how they wanted their backyards to look and which shrubs and perennials to use. Carl Haefer gave a demonstration on proper planting techniques. On the day of the planting, residents, community volunteers, and young people came out to show their support, determination, and commitment to the project.

"We saw great potential with Jardines," said Debbie Hall, a PG project manager. "We wanted to make an impact not only in terms of aesthetics, but also on the attitudes of the residents. We went door to door, to ask each one of them what plants and trees they wanted. In doing so, we gave them a voice and got them interested in their community. Without the community's involvement, this project would not have been successful."

It was agreed that APM would take care of the trees planted in the common areas, while PG would help with plantings in the front- and backyards. Work began in mid-April. In one week's time, residents and volunteers (including Patricia Sims, Margarita Gonzalez, Maria Torrens, and John and Betty Nieves), working alongside APM and PG staff members, planted sawtooth oak, river birch, and hackberry trees. They rototilled the soil, mulched beds, planted shrubs and perennials, and filled frontyard barrels with lush greenery. Before long, Jardines was looking more like lush suburbia than a city housing development. And in a show of commitment, APM has recently hired a landscape maintenance person to manage and oversee the newly planted common areas, and to work closely with PG and the tenants.

"Our partnership with Philadelphia Green is necessary to bring relief to an urban environment," said Rose Gray, Director of Housing at APM. "In the past, we would just build, build, and build on vacant land to get rid of these eyesores, but we soon learned that greening can do so much more. The Jardines project is one shining example. Through greening, people in this community now feel safer and have a greater sense of home. And with PG's horticultural expertise, we'll be able to maintain all of the work that's been done for years to come."

Marcus Vidal, APM property manager, could not be more pleased about the change. "The work being done in the complex really got everyone excited, and it has brought them closer together. Not only does everything look nice, but people want to keep it that way, too. Even the children are more careful of the gardens and have become very protective of them."

"It doesn't stop with Jardines, though," PG project manager Don Holub added optimistically. "We want this relationship to continue and grow to include other positive changes in the community, including youth environmental programs, creating greenways, and beautifying other housing developments. In the end, it is all about the power of building partnerships with community development corporations such as APM, getting residents involved, restoring pride in their community, and overall, trying to improve people's lives."

Nearby Points of Interest

MURAL ARTS PROGRAM PHILADELPHIA DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION

www.muralarts.org

www.gophila.com/murals

215/685-0750

Established in 1984 (initially as an anti-graffiti initiative), the Mural Arts Program has created more than 2,000 painted walls. This extraordinary, nationally recognized program emphasizes collaboration between the artist and the community—resulting in bold, colorful compositions that have altered the architectural landscape of the city and fostered civic pride. In the words of director Jane Golden, the murals "serve to provoke thought, to inspire dreams, to bear witness, and to remind people that they are part of a larger world." In 1996, the program became part of the Philadelphia Department of Recreation. Mural locations near Tour Stop 7 include:

530 West Dauphin Street (at 5th Street)

THE BROOK

Artist: Ana Uribe

2001

Notes: In *The Brook*, Ana Uribe has created a stream that appears to be flowing into the real garden planted on this site, and the tree in the mural is scaled to an actual tree on the right side. Landscaping was done by Philadelphia Green, a program of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, which sponsored the mural. www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org

1920 North 5th Street (at Berks Street)

TROPICAL LANDSCAPE: THE RAIN FOREST

Artist: Ana Uribe

1999

Notes: This half-real, half-imagined rain forest recalls tropical scenery that is familiar to many Latinos. Ana Uribe drew her inspiration from photographs (including a waterfall in Germany!), memories of her homeland, trees in this Philadelphia neighborhood, and even a plant grown by her mother in Colombia.

Sponsor: Sovereign Bank.

1921 North 5th Street (at Berks Street)

THE PALM

Artist: Ana Uribe

2000

Notes: *The Palm* is a thematic continuation of the *Tropical Landscape: The Rain Forest* mural across the street, although the vision is more of a garden, based on one in Medellín, the second largest city of Colombia, where Ana Uribe was born. This mural overlooks a community garden, which received a prize from the Philadelphia Green program.

Sponsors: Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, Association of Puerto Ricans on the March, The Independence Foundation.

1931 North 6th Street (on back wall of supermarket)

FRATERNITY AND UTOPIA

Artist: Roldan West

1998

Notes: Roldan West grew up in Nicaragua, where he participated in the Latin American tradition of mural painting, which reflects the trials and hopes of the people. He describes his technique as "abstract, and futuristic based on themes that are familiar to a broad public." Besides Philadelphia, locations for his public murals include Iztapalapa, Mexico; Managua, Nicaragua; and Miami, Florida.

Sponsor: Association of Puerto Ricans on the March.

429 Berks Street (at 5th Street)

CARIBBEAN SUNRISE

Artist: Ana Uribe

2001

Notes: This mural is based on a painting the artist made while in the Caribbean, and is part of a trilogy with *Tropical Landscape: The Rain Forest* and *The Palm*.

Sponsor: Association of Puerto Ricans on the March.

2239 Germantown Avenue (between Susquehanna Avenue & Dauphin Street)

GARDEN OF HOPE

Artists: Heather Senton, Josh Serantitis, Tina Davidson, Eurhi Jones

2002

Notes: *Garden of Hope* is in a garden on the property of Hogar Esperanza. It incorporates sculptured concrete, wood, cut tiles, and cut glass.

Sponsors: Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, Association of Puerto Ricans on the March, Hogar Esperanza, The Independence Foundation.

Directions

TO ASSOCIATION OF PUERTO RICANS ON THE MARCH

6th and Diamond Streets

FROM TOUR STOP 1

Reading Terminal
12th and Market Streets

By Car: West on Market Street (toward City Hall). Right onto 13th Street. Left onto Arch Street. Right onto Broad Street (Route 611). Right onto Diamond Street (which is three blocks beyond Montgomery Avenue) to 6th Street, which forms a "Y" intersection with Germantown Ave.

By Mass Transit: SEPTA bus #38 eastbound. Board at 12th and Market Streets. Get off at 7th and Market Streets. Board SEPTA bus #47 northbound. Get off at 7th and Diamond Streets. Walk one block east along Diamond Street to 6th Street.

Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority

www.septa.org

Information line: 215/580-7800

FROM TOUR STOP 6

Johnnie Tillmon Townhouses
Germantown Avenue and Master Street

By Car: West on West Master Street toward Orianna Street. Right onto North 5th Street. Left onto West Norris Street. Right onto Germantown Avenue. Germantown Avenue to 6th Street.