

PHILADELPHIA NEIGHBORHOOD RECOVERY TOUR

TOUR STOP #9: Caribe Development Zone

CENTRAL LOCATION: 100-Block West Allegheny Avenue (at 2nd Street)

BOUNDARIES: Allegheny Avenue to Westmoreland Street; 2nd Street to Howard Street

Introduction

The work of a Latino community development corporation to blend new housing, adaptive use, green space, and community services on land that was formerly occupied by industry.

Neighborhood Background

Caribe Development Zone—a modern-day housing enterprise—is sited in a neighborhood that historically gave meaning to Philadelphia’s moniker: Workshop of the World. The Allegheny Avenue–Erie Avenue district in eastern North Philadelphia possessed all the right ingredients for 19th-century, industrial-age success: extra-wide streets lined with big, multistory factory buildings; a railroad freight line with numerous sidings; and thousands of workers and their families living on nearby rowhouse blocks. During its early-20th century economic peak, the area was home to the Philco Radio and Television Corporation Plant (at C Street and Ontario Avenue), which manufactured one-third of all the radios produced in the United States. Other firms included S.K.F. Industries (manufacturer of ball bearings), Sloane-Blabon (producer of inlaid and printed linoleum), and Cuneo Eastern Press (printing press for national magazines, including *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *House Beautiful*).

The area's defining characteristics ceased to be competitive advantages in the new economy that emerged in the second half of the 20th century: (1) Because of developments in technology and communications and improved systems for delivery, radios could be assembled and distributed from a number of locations. Having one very large factory was no longer essential. (2) Trucking became the dominant transportation mode, rather than rail, and this area did not have easy access to the interstate highway system. (3) The building stock tended to be multistory factories. Developers and businesses favored cleared sites, where they could construct modern, single-story facilities that would have adequate space for loading and parking.



Senior officers enrolled in the Industrial College of the Armed Forces sample ball bearings at the SKF Industries plant. April 28, 1947.

As businesses closed or moved out in the 1960s and 1970s, and white families departed, this area experienced a shift in demographics. Although there was a major, overall decline in the number of people, the newly arrived Latino population increased dramatically—by nearly 32 percent (from 35,680 to 47,057) in the 1980s alone. Today, along the once prosperous corridors of Allegheny and Erie avenues, decades of economic disinvestment are visible. However, many of the surrounding residential blocks are relatively intact. Demolition has been more limited in this area than in other sections of North Philadelphia, and many stable, well-maintained neighborhood streets survive.

Development of the Venture

Founded in 1982, the Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises (HACE), a nonprofit community-development corporation, has been successful in pursuing two related activities. The first is support of business expansion and development, particularly in El Centro de Oro, the "Golden District" retail corridor along 5th Street (known as El Bloque de Oro), near Lehigh, where many Latino businesses are located. The second is the



production of affordable housing. As not only a developer, but also a manager of housing and commercial ventures, the organization has produced more than 400 housing units and more than 30,000 square feet of office/retail space. HACE offers housing-counseling services and provides access to business loans.

During the 1990s, HACE began implementing an

ambitious plan to redevelop a former industrial site into residential units. The 5.5-acres of redevelopment are on the north side of Front Street west of Allegheny Avenue. This is the heart of the industrial corridors of Allegheny Avenue–Erie Avenue, an area that continues to maintain a mixture of uses: (1) industrial buildings (some new, some old, some abandoned); (2) blocks of late-19th-and-early 20th-century rowhouses; and (3) scattered commercial establishments to serve the residents and workers.

The Caribe Development Zone comprises three elements:

- Villas del Caribe
Address: 167 West Allegheny Avenue, at Palethorp Street, just east of 2nd Street



81 units of new-construction rental housing for families, completed in 1997, on a cleared city block. This low-rise development is arranged around landscaped courtyards and playgrounds, with a bisecting promenade featuring a tiled fountain. Villas del Caribe includes a community room, social services offices, and the offices of HACE. Stylistically, the development integrates the classic Philadelphia row-house-look with the cultural flavor of the local Hispanic community. The primary sources of development funding were (1) Low Income Housing Tax Credit (investment equity administered by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency) and (2) Community Development Block Grant (administered by the City of Philadelphia). Villas del Caribe was the 1998 winner of the Building Excellence Awards of the Delaware Valley, Residential Multi-family Category.



- Casa Caribe
Address: 3231–65 North 2nd Street, at Westmoreland Street

A 70-year-old, former industrial building, dramatically converted to 53 senior-living apartments. Completed in 1998, Casa Caribe is a joint venture between HACE and Episcopal Hospital, a nonprofit community teaching hospital. The building was stripped down to its structural framework. A typical floor plan includes a living-dining room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, and storage area. Most of the financing for this development came from a federal program, Section 2902, with additional funds made available through the City's Community Development Block Grant program.



- Caribe Towers
Address: 3231–65 North 2nd Street at Westmoreland Street

Forthcoming conversion of a five-story former factory building into 57 apartments for elderly residents, which will have social-service facilities on the ground floor and possibly a grocery facility. A large adjacent garage has been demolished for parking. Anticipated completion date is Summer 2004. Section 2902 and Community Development Block Grant funding are expected to support most of the cost of development.



The Caribe Development Zone exemplifies the reclamation of a former industrial site in a way that is suitable for its time and place. It includes new housing built at lower-than-traditional density (providing a generous amount of green space); the blending of housing and services at a single location, and the conversion of an obsolete industrial building to residential use. The zone is particularly well located near additional community and institutional services, as well as other amenities such as shopping and banking. Public transportation provides quick connections that link Allegheny Avenue to other neighborhoods and to the downtown area.

For additional information, contact:

- Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises
215/426-8025 voice
215/426-9122 fax
167 West Allegheny Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19140
www.hacecdc.org
- For additional information on the design and construction of Villas del Caribe and Casa Caribe, contact

Kitchen & Associates Architectural Services

856/854-1880 voice

856/854-3842 fax

756 Haddon Avenue

Collingswood, NJ 08108

www.kitchenandassociates.com

- J. J. DeLuca Company, Inc., General Contractors
610/995-9440 voice
610/995-2928 fax
125 Strafford Avenue, Suite 200
Wayne, PA 19087
www.jjdeluca.com

A Personal Perspective

Comments by Guillermo (Bill) Salas, Jr.

President

Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises

The Casa Caribe project encompasses more than five acres of land. The neighborhood that we wanted to develop was seriously blighted—including two acres that were completely abandoned, and two others that contained deteriorated, multistory factory buildings. Through the efforts of our organization, the Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises (HACE), Casa Caribe has been a strong catalyst for revitalizing the neighborhood.



The development is made up of three phases. The first two—which are named the Villas de Caribe

and Casa Caribe—have already been completed. We are proud that the Villas de Caribe won the 1998 Building Excellence Award, sponsored by Commerce Bank and the Philadelphia Business Journal, for excellence in development and service to the community. As the third phase of the development begins—Caribe Towers—we look forward to modeling the project on our past successes.

The design of the buildings was very important to us. We chose a Mediterranean–Spanish style for the exterior, using materials such as terra cotta, stucco, and brick. On the interior, we created an open green area designed for children to play in. There is also a fountain that serves as a gathering place for residents to meet and relax after work and on weekends. (This interior green space was facilitated by the absence of any adjacent neighbors to the development; we were able to create on-street parking rather than use the courtyard for this purpose.) Each kitchen is positioned to look out on the green space, allowing parents to keep watch on their children at play.

The project has been a true stabilizing force for the neighborhood. For the first time in many years, people are investing additional residential and commercial dollars in our community. Property values are rising. Close to Casa Caribe, older houses that were previously valued at \$20,000 are now moving into the \$30,000 range. I would like to attribute much of this activity to the work we have done in the community. That work sent a clear signal to nearby residents: There is hope.

Nearby Points of Interest

MURAL ARTS PROGRAM PHILADELPHIA DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION

www.muralarts.org

www.gophila.com/murals

215/686-8366

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. Murals locations near Tour Stop 9 include:

3200 B Street, at West Allegheny Avenue (south side of Stetson Middle School)

TROPICALIA

Artists: Paul Santoleri, Geraldine Stanley-Hegne. Completed 2000.

Notes: The mural is based on drawings that Paul Santoleri made as a artist-in-residence in the Dominican Republic. This school originally served children of John B. Stetson Hat Manufactory (see Tour Stop 6). Santoleri incorporated Stetson hats into the design, to give a notion of the past and the present at the same time. The title, "Tropicalia," refers to a Brazilian musical movement.

Sponsor: The William Penn Foundation



Tropicalia. Mural by Paul Santoleri and Geraldine Stanley-Hegne.



Tropicalia. Mural by Paul Santoleri and Geraldine Stanley-Hegne.

341 West Allegheny Avenue

MY FRIENDS IN THE JUNGLE

Artist: Kevin McDevitt. Completed 2001.

Sponsors: City of Philadelphia, Forest C. Lattner Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Nathan Cummings Foundation, Surdna Foundation, The William Penn Foundation.



My Friends in the Jungle. Mural by Kevin McDevitt.

More Photos





Directions

TO CARIBE DEVELOPMENT ZONE

100-Block West Allegheny Avenue (at 2nd Street)

FROM BEGINNING POINT

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 West Allegheny Avenue. After Crossing Germantown Avenue, soft Left onto West Sedgley Avenue. Soft Right back onto West Allegheny Avenue to 2nd Street.



By Mass Transit: SEPTA bus #33 westbound on Market Street. Board at 12th and Market Streets. Get off at 22nd Street and Allegheny Avenue. Board SEPTA bus #60 eastbound on Allegheny Avenue. Get off at Allegheny Avenue and Front Street.

Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority Information line:
215/580-7800
www.septa.org

FROM PRECEDING TOUR STOP

LEHIGH PARK CENTER

Lawrence Street between Huntingdon Street and Lehigh Avenue

By Car: South on Lawrence Street. Right onto Huntingdon. Right onto 5th Street. Right onto West Allegheny Avenue to 2nd Street.