



40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION of
UNIVERSITY CITY HIGH SCHOOL
1971-72 + 2011-12

University City: They Said It Couldn't Be Done

The People, the Plans, the Deeds

Author: Unknown

Periodical: *The Evening Bulletin* Date: August 5, 1965
Location: Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA
Envelope: University City 1965



Continued from First Page

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Adjoining the Center on the north side of the block between 39th and 40th sts. Stand some of the research facilities of the new Presbyterian University of Pennsylvania Medical Center, just created last month in an agreement between Penn and Presbyterian Hospital.

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“This neighborhood is set now,” Mrs. Barkan says. “But I can remember not many years ago a politician saying to me, ‘This area is integrating and I don’t know how long we can hold the zoning.’”

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But the zoning held and today whites and Negroes, professors and postal clerks, artists and salesmen, doctors and lawyers live side by side in harmony.

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The Barkans and others like them fought as many as 15 requests for zoning variances and changes a week, every week, for years. Today, the requests are almost down to nothing.

In a clean, air-conditioned office in a building at 36th and Walnut sts. Sits Leo Molinaro. Actually, Molinaro does not sit—not very often anyway. He is almost constantly on the move.

A small man with lively brown eyes who smiles readily, Molinaro, as executive vice president of the West Philadelphia Corp., is most directly responsible for the development—both public and private—of University City.

The non-profit corporation was formed by Penn, Presbyterian Hospital, Drexel Institute of Technology and the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science.

Outside Molinaro’s window, workmen in yellow helmets move along the foundations of Penn’s new Dietrich Graduate Library. There couldn’t be a more fitting symbol of what Molinaro is trying to accomplish; even so, the contractor is not working fast enough to suit him.

He stands at the window and wants to urge these people into the same kind of ferocious activity he is capable of. Like most of the planners of University City, he is tired of drawing plans, making up brochures and building models. He wants to see more in concrete and steel.

1,000 New Families

He has the facts and figures about what is happening in University City.

Are the substantial people moving back? A quick flip through some stacks of literature and Molinaro comes up with the answer. Since 1960, he says, about 1,000 families of University of Pennsylvania faculty and personnel alone have moved into the area.

In 1960, 10 percent of the personnel of all of the area’s institutions lived in University City. Today, it is up to 25 percent.

About 45 families have taken advantage of informal financing help from Penn. Penn is now working on a program that will offer 100 percent mortgage financing to its people who want to buy in University City.

But nobody, least of all Molinaro, wants the community to be made up exclusively of institution-connected families. The hope is, he says, that it will never exceed 50 percent. The mixture of human types and occupations is part of the charm of University City.

Nowhere is this mixture more evident than in the University City Swim Club. The club is a thriving concern now in the block bounded by 48th, 49th, Spruce and Pine sts., but in June of 1963, when the idea first occurred to Dr. Cox, it appeared to many to be a wild, improbable, hair-brained scheme.

Even Mrs. Barkan, whose faith in University City never wavered, acknowledges that when she and her husband bought one of the first \$300 membership bonds, they were sure they were throwing their money away.

“But it was for a good cause,” she says.

Swimming Together

The cause was to answer the question of whether a financial institution would believe that whites and Negroes would swim together and, if one was so convinced and granted a mortgage, whether whites and Negroes would actually swim together.

Dr. Cox, a handsome, tanned psychiatrist, lounged at the poolside recently and shook his head at the recollection of those early days of anguish and uncertainty.

“There were lots of people who believed this would never get off the ground,” he said.

But it opened ahead of schedule in June, 1964, and today has its quota of 300 families and a growing waiting list. There was never any attempt to set quotas based on race, occupation and the like. To this day, in fact, Dr. Cox is not sure about the ratio of Negroes to whites in the club, but he believes it to be about 15 percent Negro.

The same human mixture attracted Giles L. Zimmerman to the area. Zimmerman, tall, husky, garrulous executive director of International House, which boards, cares for and helps educate foreign students in the city, recently moved into Powelton Village.

One of the reasons for his move is that International House, now at 140 N. 15th st., will move to the northwest corner of 37th and Chestnut sts. in 1968 and he wanted to be close to his work.

Also, as a Quaker, he says he wanted to make a “personal contribution to the sociological development of the community,” which means mostly that he wanted to live in an integrated neighborhood.

But another reason, he acknowledges, is that there are such “interesting characters” living in the area.

Enthusiastic Developer

Maurize Hertzfeld, a real estate developer who has accounted for a major portion of the private housing and apartment construction in University City, speaks with typical enthusiasm about the area.

A muscular, crew-cut man of 38, Hertzfeld talks about the problems he had interesting financial institutions in backing his plans for University City just three years ago.

“Everybody told me I was five years too soon,” he said.

He finally got financing for nine houses he wanted to build at 45th and Osage av., but only after selling four of the nine before they were even built. Today, financial institutions are competing for his business.

Hertzfeld predicts that some day living in University City will be the “thing to do.” Then watch it grow, he says.

He sees it as something unique. Normally, he points out, communities develop along ethnic lines. But there is another glue cementing University City people together and this Hertzfeld defines loosely as “culture.”

People of many ethnic and occupational groups are drawn there for the cultural and educational opportunities offered not only by the institutions but by contact with each other.

Ben Orloff is the friendly, articulate president of the Walnut Plaza Merchants’ Association. He is the manager of Joseph A. Banks, Inc., men’s wear store at 3417 Walnut st., and the driving force behind the organization.

A year or so ago, the 3400 block of Walnut st. was replete with rumors and half-truths regarding a proposal to tear down the stores and replace them with University of Pennsylvania academic buildings with retail shops on the first floors.

Shadow Dispelled

To deal intelligently with this shadow that had suddenly fallen across their prosperity, 18 merchants, prodded by Orloff, banded together for mutual protection and cooperation.

As a result, an agreement was reached with the West Philadelphia Corp. and the university that members of the association will be the tenants of the new shopping center and will be placed in temporary locations while it is being built.

The plaza will face on 34th st. between Walnut and Sansom sts. The store fronts will open on a broad semi-circle, landscaped, with perhaps a fountain and flagstone walks.

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“There’s a new spirit and pride in the block now,” Orloff says. “The merchants have fixed up their stores; they’ve taken down signs we felt were offensive, and they’ve improved the quality of their services.”

“We’re enlightened now,” he adds. “We’ve grown a great deal.”

The faith in the future of University City is most frequently expressed by the people who have recently moved in.

Neville R. Kallenbach, assistant professor of biology at Penn, and his wife, Susan, moved to 3912 Delancey st. from La Jolla, Calif., where as Mrs. Kallenbach puts it, “you couldn’t get anyplace without a car. Here, a car is superfluous.”

“I’m convinced the community has a wonderful future,” the mother of a two-year-old boy says. “Just in the year we’ve been here, two families have moved into our block from the suburbs.”

Mrs. Susan Detwiler, whose husband, Willard S., Jr., works for a private city planning firm, was asked if she felt the least apprehensive moving into a section that not long ago had a notorious reputation.

“We did buy a German shepard,” she acknowledged. But this precaution was far outweighed in their minds by their faith that the area’s future will be “far rosier than the present,” she said.

A Dual Heritage

These people are the inheritors of what was once one of the finest suburban residential sections in the world. It is only necessary to drive around the area to see signs of former grandeur—the old Victorian castles of Powelton; the massive Civil War period and the Italianate [houses], and the solid houses [...] Clarence Siegel and other [...] in the building of the 1920s.

It is strange to find what the redevelopers call sub-standard houses that have carved stone cherubs frolicking across their facades and ornate gingerbread decorations gracing their cornices and cupolas.

The area began to decline in the Depression and the crowding and relaxed building code standards of World War II dealt it a staggering blow.

“After the war,” Molinaro says, “the area was very tired. It was all worn out.”

It was ripe for the speculators, the slumlords who came when the low-income families began to arrive, many from the South seeking cheap housing and willing to live jammed together in tiny rooms hastily partitioned by the profiteers.

That might have been the end had it not been for the fact that the community was the home of the city’s proudest educational, medical and scientific institutions. These institutions decided, for their own good, to take the leadership role in its revival.

Ironically, it was an act of brutality that provided the final spark to get the community moving toward reclamation.

On the night of April 25, 1958, a 26-year-old Korean graduate student at Penn left his apartment to mail a letter at 36th and Hamilton sts. On his way home, In-Ho Oh was set upon and beaten to death by a band of hoodlums looking for someone to rob for the price of admission to a dance.

“The Murder of In-Ho Oh rocked the community,” Molinaro says. “People began [...] themselves, ‘What has happened to us? What have we come to?’ For the first time, the community was galvanized into action.”

The action thus generated hasn’t been good for everybody. The “superfluous people” who will be moved out by the redevelopers are angry and bitter, according to Rev. Mr. Johnston who serves as minister of community services for the Tabernacle Church, a federated congregation of United Presbyterian and United Church of Christ members at 37th and Chestnut sts.

A tall, thin man of 31, Mr. Johnston feels that much of the relocation procedures of urban renewal are “inhumane and brutish.”

Helping the Displaced

He and his church are trying to help by organizing a Colunteer Community Resources Project which will aid the relocated people in the problems of moving, in getting settled in new areas and other social problems this kind of uprooting generates.

“The city has no housing for these people,” Mr. Johnston says. “They’ll simply move into other areas nearby, probably in the Mantua section, and take the ghetto with them.”

It’s an illwind that blows no one any good, however. In the place of the old ghetto, will be a new community.

“The economic base of a city is no longer industry,” Molinaro says, “It is research and development and health, education and welfare services.

“This is what we’re building out here.”

As the community develops, he says, there will be more pressure to improve the public schools. Already, a university-related program at the Henry C. Lea School, 47th and Locust sts., has attracted wide attention.

The Board of Education plans new high schools, and a satellite science center to relate with the institutions existing and proposed is also contemplated.

Someday, wooded village squares, “to break up the urban texture,” as Molinaro puts it, will be spotted throughout the community. More streets will become tree-lined walkways.

Proposed expressways will remove some of the 300,000 vehicles a day that now roar through the area east and west on Walnut, Chestnut and neighboring streets.

It's still a dream, most of it, but the foundation is there.

[Photo caption: University City's boundaries and some of the landmarks, old and new, within them.]



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