

ALL RESIDENTS WELCOME

Coming to the monthly meetings gives you an opportunity to find out what's going on and helps us to know your problems and concerns. Many of our regulars have a wide range of experience in dealing with the same sort of problem you may be experiencing and can usually help you find a way to resolve the issue. Join us on the second Monday of each month, 7:00 p.m. at Candlelight Park, 1520 Candlelight Boulevard, at the intersection of Oak Forest and Candlelight, and find out what's going on. If you have not already paid your voluntary dues for 2004, please send your check for \$20 to: OFHA INC., P.O. Box 920561, Houston, TX 77292-0561.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: () _____ Email: _____

Additional donation enclosed for: Tree Fund Esplanade Improvements Citizens on Patrol

OAK FOREST HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.
P. O. BOX 920561
HOUSTON TX 77292-0561

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD?

Visit our website, www.ofha.org, and view our most frequently asked questions at www.ofha.org/faq. Also, you can join our Yahoo Newsgroup by going to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/OFHA>.

OAK FOREST

HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2004

OAK FOREST IS DEED RESTRICTED

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

from Greg Ryden

When my wife and I bought our home in Oak Forest two years ago, we were certain that this neighborhood was going to be a great place to live, and we've been absolutely correct. After receiving our first newsletter and attending several meetings, we decided to join the OFHA to become more involved in what was going on in the neighborhood. As I learned early, volunteerism is what drives this organization. We depend on our residents to beautify, promote, improve and protect Oak Forest.

Believe it or not Oak Forest is the third largest neighborhood in Houston. We are comprised of over 5000 homes, yet just over 500 households belong to the OFHA. The OFHA is very appreciative of its supporters, but our efforts in 2004 will need the support and voices of many more residents in order to keep Oak Forest a great place to live. As the new President of the Oak Forest Homeowners Association for 2004, the new board and I have some ideas that we would like to implement with your help in the neighborhood.

- Beautification projects involving major tree plantings and vegetative end caps in our esplanades along the major thoroughfares of 43rd, Antoine & Watonga.
- A comprehensive beautification effort to renovate the esplanades along Ella from the railroad tracks to Candlelight, incorporating low maintenance vegetation, shrubs and trees.
- Enforcement of Deed Restrictions and Architectural Guidelines through cooperation with the associated OFHA Committees and the City of Houston Legal, Planning and Neighborhood Protection Departments and our District A representative Toni Lawrence.
- Promotion of Oak Forest in the surrounding communities as a great place to live.

These projects will take time, effort and some money but in the short as well as long term, these improvements will be well worth the work put forward. Please remember to send in membership forms, your effort and contributions will rapidly be turned into visible change and improvements around Oak Forest.

PROTECT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD BY JOINING OFHA

The Oak Forest Homeowners Association invites you to join or renew your membership. Membership is only \$20 per year and is a way to become involved in the revitalization of your community. OFHA is the only organization dedicated to making our neighborhood a better place to live and work. Become a part of this effort by joining today.

Remember that membership in OFHA is voluntary. Your voluntary dues help to sponsor many projects: esplanade beautification, Oak Forest marquees, the quarterly newsletter, the www.ofha.org website and Citizens On Patrol (COP). Join your neighbors in helping Oak Forest live up to the name, "the beautiful urban woods."

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Meetings of the Oak Forest Homeowners Association are held at the Candlelight Park clubhouse in Candlelight Park located at 1520 Candlelight Blvd.

Dates of upcoming meetings are:

- **April 12**
- **May 10** *Guest Speaker* - Council Member Toni Lawrence
- **June 14**

If you would like to speak at a upcoming meeting or would like to request a speaker, contact us at 713-688-6342 or by email at hotline@ofha.org.

HIGHWAY 290 EXPANSION PLANS

by Wes Jones

On March 1st, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) held a public meeting, revealing preliminary studies for the expansion of HWY 290 from Loop 610 in to FM 2920. The plans also includes development of the Hempstead Corridor.

For Oak Forest and surrounding areas, this means the possible acquisition and demolition of homes and businesses.

There are three possible alignments though Oak Forest. Each plan taking anywhere from 8' to 32' feet of additional right-of-way. This could effect over 40 homes in Oak Forest.

If you have questions, would like more information, or would like join TxDOT's mailing list, please contact their Houston District Office by calling 713-802-5274. For more information, goto: <http://www.dot.state.tx.us/hou/mis/us290/project.html>

Use your Randalls Card and donate money to OFHA.

For more information go to www.ofha.com/donate.html

USE CODE:
9719

INCREASE THE VALUE OF YOUR HOME

by Angelica Wurth

When was the last time you looked at the front of your house? We go to work, take our children to school, and run errands; coming and going but not really ever taking a good look at what the front of our house says about us and our neighborhood.

As I drive around our "urban woods," I see homes with kept yards; I also see homes with not so kept yards. Did you know that just a little bit of work to the front of our houses can increase its value? That's right, just a kept yard with either shrubs or flowers can increase curb appeal. By creating a beautiful environment in the front of your house you can increase its value. For example, let's take a look at two very similar homes, one may appraise at \$110,000 and the other for \$130,000; yes there could be as much as a \$20,000 difference due to curb appeal. Not only should you, as a homeowner be concerned about the value of your home, but also the value of your neighborhood. We as neighbors should be conscious that we affect one another in our neighborhood. Oak Forest can become an even more beautiful neighborhood. So take down those Christmas lights, mow and manicure your lawn and begin to plant some flowers or pretty shrubs. You may even want to consider a fresh coat of paint or even some shutters for your windows. Shutters are very inexpensive from your local home improvement store, and they can add much value.

With spring soon approaching, I encourage you to take action, improve your home's look. This effort will bring you tremendous enjoyment not to mention increase pride in your home. Who knows, you neighbors may take notice and be moved to action too!

OFHA LAUNCHES NEW PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

With the New Year starting, OFHA has recognized the need to create a Public Relations Committee (PRC). The PRC was created in order to create awareness about the benefits of membership to our association. The PRC's mission is to recruit more members in order to work together to revitalize Oak Forest.

There are five initial activities that the PRC will be developing and implementing. The first initiative is "The Walkabout." The Walkabout will consist of PRC members canvassing the neighborhood introducing themselves and the OFHA. The objective for this initiative is to increase awareness and introduce the neighborhood to benefits of joining your homeowners association. Please look for our PRC members in their official OFHA green T-shirt to come to your home this Spring. We encourage you take a few moments to learn how you can be a part of our revitalization effort of Oak Forest. Coming soon, The Beautiful Home challenge. Look for more details on this initiative by visiting our website, www.ofha.org!

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD - MANNA

by Jan Garver

In addition to being home to some wonderful people, Oak Forest is home to an outstanding organization that has been providing assistance services in our community for over 15 years.

MANNA began in 1988 as an outgrowth of an informal monthly gathering of area pastors who believed that working together would allow them to better meet the needs of their community. MANNA's mission is to serve the basic needs of persons in the area who, for various reasons, cannot sustain themselves or their families. The mission is fulfilled by providing emergency assistance in a variety of ways such as food, rent, utilities, transportation, prescriptions and referrals to other agencies.

Primary funding for the assistance programs comes from the thrift shop. The thrift shop first opened on Ella in August of 1989. In a short time, it outgrew that space and moved about 300 feet away. The assistance office, which began operating in December of that year, was located in an adjoining space.

Over the years, MANNA has grown steadily. There are currently 19 area churches in the coalition. It thrives in large part because of the dedication and hard work of all the churches and people involved. In 1998 the thrift shop and assistance ministry moved to the larger spaces they now occupy at 1806 and 1810 W. 43rd.

Since the beginning, the thrift shop has been a wonderful place to both browse and buy - just ask any of the "regulars". Clothing, furniture, household goods, knickknacks, jewelry, books, cards, you name it and they have had it at one time or another. If not, they probably will eventually! Donations can be dropped off anytime the store is open. Hours are 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Monday-Friday and 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. on Saturday. Pick-up for furniture and working appliances donations can be made by calling the thrift shop.

More recently, a Vision Station program has been added to provide vision screening and low-cost eyeglasses for qualified clients by combining forces with InFOCUS. MANNA has also taken over responsibility for the Heights Meals on Wheels program.

Last but certainly not least, if you are 55 or over, come join the fun at the Senior Activity Days at the community center. They have exercise classes on Tuesday and Thursday, and on Wednesday, they play games at 10:00, followed by line dancing at 1:00! So grab those tennies and dancing shoes, and get over there!

For questions concerning hours of operation, programs or information about volunteering, contact MANNA at 713-686-6440.

Phone numbers for the MANNA programs:

Emergency Assistance Program 713-686-3064
Vision Station Program 713-686-6440 ext. 202

TAKE A LOOK AT THE OFHA ARCHIVES!
www.ofha.org/archives

AN INTERVIEW WITH COUNCIL MEMBER TONI LAWRENCE

by Stephanie Cox

FLOODING IN OAK FOREST

"No mayor has done anything on flooding for 25 years," reported the Council Member. Therefore, there is a lot to be done. The Council Member recently sat down with Jon Vanden Bosch, the current Director of Public Works for the City of Houston, to get information on what's happening with the flooding situation in Houston, particularly District A. She's also looking to other examples of successful flood control. For example, she has spoken with the heads of the Medical Center, to come up with ideas that would work for our area. She believes that things are progressing, citing the approval of a retention pond on Highway 290 between Antoine and Pinemont, and the redesigning of the Inwood Forest Golf Course, also in District A, north of Oak Forest.

NEIGHBORHOOD PROTECTION AND ENFORCEMENT OF DEED RESTRICTIONS

Ms. Lawrence feels strongly about neighborhood protection. She said that currently, only 2 to 3 hours per day is spent patrolling the neighborhood, and the other time, the officers must leave for traffic or other city business. "Many other DRT's are able to spend more time than our officers who go off to do traffic, etc." She would like more time spent in Oak Forest. She feels that reprioritizing should occur by using the chain of command in the police department. She stated that with a new police chief and new officers added to the force, our officers would be more freed up. Also, she believes that more communication with the captains, sergeants, etc., regarding our complaints about this will encourage more to be done. Having a good relationship with the officers in that office, she has met with the 43rd. storefront (DRT) to discuss this and get the ball rolling.

311 AND RESPONSIVENESS

Although it seems that several people have had problems getting a response from 311, the Council Member feels 311 is the best way to get complaints addressed. She states that very often 311 will send her office emails that pertain to District A. She also said that she has visited the 311 office while they worked, and that the average waiting time was 30 seconds per call.

TRAIN ANNOYANCES

Concerning the annoyance of the railroad lines and trains running through the neighborhood at inconvenient times, Ms. Lawrence noted that our neighbors in Garden Oaks have had the same com-

plaint. Their civic organization recently met with the railroad line. The railroad company has agreed to send trains down the bigger lines like I-45 to get more trains out of our neighborhoods. Also, she said that our neighborhood can request the rail line stop honking their horns at odd hours, and that the trains can abide by this.

TAXES

Although she stated there is not much city council can do about property taxes, Ms. Lawrence does feel citizens, especially the elderly, are taxed too much. She feels that as the economy gets better, taxes will be lowered. Also, the Council Member said to look for a 3- or 4-cent reduction from the city to occur, which is a substantial amount with the millions the city receives in taxes.

LIBRARY HOURS

Ms. Lawrence said that the short hours at the Oak Forest Library are due to a budget problem. She also said that residents need to express to the director of the library system, the city council, and the mayor their need for later hours. A possibility also would be to reallocate the hours so that more people could use the library.

ELLA BLVD. CONSTRUCTION

Lastly, Ms. Lawrence stated that the Ella Boulevard project is almost complete. It had to be torn up again at certain places because it did not meet inspections, which is the reason it has taken so long to open up.

Council Member Lawrence said that she is counting on her constituents to let her know what is needed in their area. She says that every email in her office is given a work order number, and they check up on all of them. Her Chief of Staff Barbara Harville is highly experienced in her job and also lives in District A. In addition, another member of her staff, Robert Quarles, is an Oak Forest resident and former treasurer for OFHA. Therefore, we are well represented in her office.

Recently, the Council Member attended the meeting on March 8th and addressed various concerns of the residents. I encourage everyone to come to the OFHA meetings if you have issues in the neighborhood that need to be addressed. If you want to make a difference and you want things to change, I encourage you to get involved.

YAHOO NEWSGROUP

The Oak Forest Yahoo newsgroup is the fastest, most efficient method to get information on activities in the Oak Forest community. The group provides notices to residents of upcoming events and provides a place to ask questions or raise issues of interest to the Oak Forest community. Membership is restricted to residents and property owners only, and the group is moderated.

To subscribe send an email to OFHA-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or email us a hotline@ofha.org

BEAUTIFICATION COMMITTEE

The Beautification Committee needs your help. We need volunteers and new ideas to keep our neighborhood attractive. We also need volunteers for neighborhood cleanup days. Recently, we've organized twice to revamp Ella Boulevard south of 43rd St., due to City construction and the contractor's neglect.

If you would like to get involved with the Beautification Committee, contact Wes Jones at wes@ofha.org. Please remember, we are a volunteer group and only function because of your help.

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Contact Wes Jones
at wes@ofha.org