

COMMON GROUND

A Newsletter Celebrating Neighborhoods

Budget, Details Keys to Successful Home Renovation Project

It starts with a vision.



Geoffrey Tarr points out a refinished door in the home he is restoring on East 13th Street.

Choosing a home suitable for a renovation project involves seeing beyond overgrown yards and peeling paint, according to Deborah Gardner, who has overseen the restoration of two vintage homes in older Chattanooga neighborhoods.

"Plaster can be repaired, floors can be salvaged, and even termite damage can be repaired," Mrs. Gardner said. "But first you have to see a vision for a home."

Mrs. Gardner describes home renovation as "a labor of love." She and her husband, Phil, have restored a house in Ferger Place and their own home in North Chattanooga.

The Gardners moved to Chattanooga in 2001, seeking a new city close to the Marietta, Georgia base of Mr. Gardner's health care software business. The couple had looked for an older home in Atlanta, but prices were too high. After stopping in Chattanooga for dinner while on a trip, Mrs. Gardner picked up a real estate magazine. She was pleasantly surprised to find an abundance of affordable older homes that could be renovated.

Geoffrey and Amanda Tarr were also drawn to Chattanooga by the wide variety of vintage housing stock. Mr. Tarr spent 15

years as an advertising executive in Atlanta. He began remodeling homes on weekends, and "I fell in love with the idea of that," he said. The couple moved to Chattanooga four years ago to begin their business, Bungalow Rescue and Restoration.

The key to a successful home restoration is "keeping the charm and character of the house," Mr. Tarr said. "What holds the interest and value of these older houses is retaining that character. It takes more time, but it's worth the effort for the neighborhood."

Mr. Tarr stresses the importance of using architectural details, lighting, doors, mantles and fixtures that are true to a home's period. These are readily available at several Chattanooga businesses, flea markets, and antique stores and through Web sites and magazines.

Deciding on a budget is a crucial element for success in home renovation. "Budgets can run away from you," Mr. Tarr said. "You may have to adjust your expectations based on your budget."



The bathroom in this restoration project features detailed tile work, built-in shelving, and a claw-foot tub.



This home on East 13th Street is being renovated by Geoffrey Tarr of Bungalow Rescue and Restoration. Built around 1908, the home features original beadboard, built-in cabinets, and two fireplaces with antique mantels.

Chattanooga has several neighborhoods that offer good choices for home restoration projects. Mr. Tarr advises finding a neighborhood in transition to get the best price on a home.

Mrs. Gardner enjoys living in a restored home because "these houses are history," she said. "They have so much character."

The North Chattanooga resident enjoys not only her house, but her neighbors as well. "I live in a neighborhood, not a suburb," Mrs. Gardner said. "These are lifelong friends around me."

Home Renovation Tips:

- When choosing a contractor, get references. Ask to see examples of work similar to your home project.
- Use a reliable home inspector to examine the structural integrity of the home. Is the foundation solid? What is the status of footings and joists and beams?
- Work on a home's systems is the next step. Are the electric, plumbing, heating and air systems up to code and comfortable? Is the roof solid?
- Discuss a budget and what you can afford to do to a home.
- Never pay a contractor or sub-contractor money up front. Reserve payment until the work is completed to your satisfaction.
- Maintain clear communication with your contractor on your expectations and budget.
- Get ideas for your home renovation from books, Web sites, television shows and magazines. Try to stick with original materials in your project.
- Ask other homeowners who have completed renovations for their tips and advice.
- If you are a "do-it-yourselfer," attend workshops offered by home improvement stores for tips on a wide variety of home projects.

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INSPECTORS VITAL LINK... *Continued from page 3*

Chattanooga native and earned an economics degree from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Explaining the role of inspectors, Mr. Ridge said, "We have a lot of face-to-face contact with neighbors. Our work is very hands-on, and we are very accessible. We will always answer complaints."

Meeting needs is the most satisfying aspect of code enforcement work, Mr. Ridge said. "People treat you like a hero when you've been able to resolve their issue," he said. "You can see the glow in someone's face when you've been able to help them. That makes the job rewarding."

"I enjoy working with the people," said Mrs. Parham. "It's rewarding to go back to a street and find that work has been done. It makes you feel proud to see that you have made a difference."

Mr. Ridge is single and his hobbies include hiking, camping and University of Tennessee football. Mrs. Parham is married and has a daughter who attends Tyner Academy. Her hobbies include supporting her daughter's activities as a basketball player.

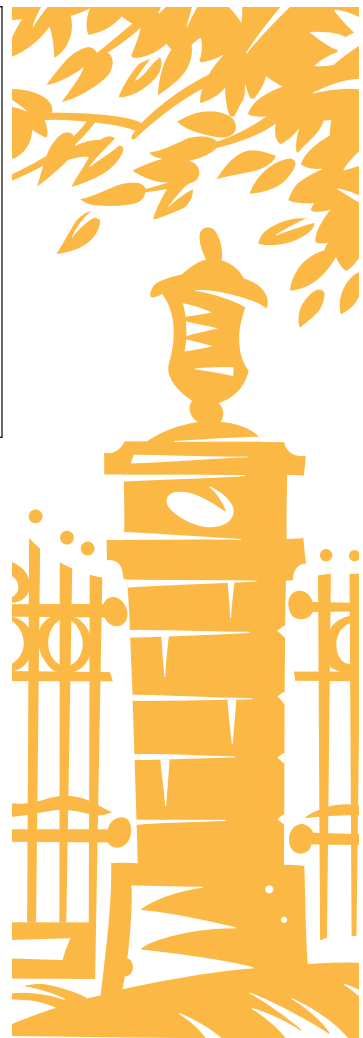
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Upcoming Events

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- MARCH:**
- 2 City Council Meeting
 - 9 City Council Meeting
 - 16 City Council Meeting
 - 18 CNAC Meeting
 - 22 CNAC Meeting
 - 23 City Council Meeting
 - 16-17 Greater Chattanooga College & Career Fair
 - 17 St. Patrick's Day
 - 30 City Council Meeting

- APRIL:**
- 6 City Council Meeting
 - 9 Good Friday
 - 13 City Council Meeting
 - 15 CNAC Meeting
 - 16-18 2004 Spring Wildflower Festival
 - 18 Chattanooga Market Opens
 - 18 Tour of Downtown Living
 - 19 CNAC Meeting
 - 20 City Council Meeting
 - 24-25 National Cornbread Festival
 - 27 City Council Meeting



2 Codes Division Offers Protection and Delivers Results

Part-time crime fighters. Part-time detectives. Part-time social services workers. And full-time community activists—the Neighborhood Services Department's code inspectors fill many roles in providing answers to concerns.

The purpose of the Codes and Community Services division is to enforce city ordinances related to property upkeep. These ordinances cover issues including litter, housing, undergrowth, and abandoned vehicles. Formerly known as Better Housing, the codes division has been in existence in some form of Chattanooga city government since the 1940s.

"Our goal is to protect the investments of property owners in the city and ensure the quality of life of the community," said Steve Hargis, a NSD lead code enforcement inspector.

Often, inspectors find mixed reactions to their efforts. "Some are grateful we are taking actions against blighted properties, but some feel we are persecuting the poor people," said Doris Parham, code enforcement inspector. "Some property owners don't care if they are in violation. Many owner-occupied properties can't afford to make corrections and don't know where to go to get help."

In a typical day, inspectors will spend 75 percent of their time in the field meeting the needs of property owners. The remaining 25 percent involves paper work. Every Thursday, inspectors make appearances in environmental court, a division of City Court. The most persistent or drastic cases end up here.

Explaining the process of dealing with problems, Tony Smith, a NSD lead inspector, said a complaint notice is first sent to a problem property owner. Depending on the violation, the owner is given 10 to 30 days to correct the issue.

"We try to be as reasonable as possible while being responsive to neighborhood groups," said Randy Ridge, NSD code enforcement inspector.

If the situation is not corrected, a citation is issued. Quick results are not always easy to obtain due to problems with out-of-town or deceased property owners. Further citations can be written depending on response, with the worst offenders ultimately being cited to City Court.

Often, NSD officials will seek out ways to help violators correct problems, such as finding church groups who are willing to provide labor or businesses who are willing to donate materials such as paint.

Inspectors help improve the quality of life for Chattanooga residents because "there's a direct correlation between codes violations and crime, property values and health standards in the community," Mr. Hargis said. By doing their jobs well, inspectors can help make the neighborhood a more desirable place to live and assist in creating a feeling of community in the area.



The Neighborhood Services Department recently hosted a discovery delegation from Japan who came to Chattanooga to learn more about the city's work with neighborhoods. They met with several local neighborhood leaders to exchange ideas and visited area attractions.



Dear Neighbor,

Where do you turn when a neighbor's disheveled home begins to create hazards for your family? How do you get results when an overgrown yard threatens the value of your property?

This issue of *Common Ground* focuses on the NSD and city codes. We highlight our Codes and Community Services division, providing explanations of how to address issues of concern among neighbors. We'll introduce you to professionals in that division who perform a key role in keeping all our neighborhoods safe and attractive. This issue also features stories on the growing numbers of singles, families, couples and "empty-nesters" who are choosing in-town neighborhoods. They are joined by a number of businesses and shops that are relocating to our city's urban core, restoring vital residential and commercial connections.

Chattanooga's neighborhoods attracted attention from Japan when a discovery delegation from that country visited in January to learn more about our work. NSD's neighborhood relations team led the group on visits with local neighborhood leaders and elected officials. Our visitors included a consultant with the Japanese Research Institute and the deputy director of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport National Planning.

As spring approaches, take time to drive through a new neighborhood on a Sunday afternoon. See what our city has to offer, and consider coming back home to heart of Chattanooga.



Watch Kenardo Curry on "Neighborhood Matters" airing this winter on WTCI-TV45/DT29.

Sincerely,

Kenardo K. Curry
Kenardo K. Curry
Administrator



This Feger Place home offers many of the traditional features that are drawing families back to vintage residences in Chattanooga's in-town neighborhoods.

Downtown Living: A Popular, Convenient Option for All Ages

As owners of the St. John's Restaurant on Market Street, Nathan and Jerri Lindley initially moved to the Southside from Lookout Mountain to be closer to their business. But they found much more to love about in-town living than a three-minute walk to work.

The Lindleys enjoy walking to downtown restaurants and activities. They frequently use the CARTA shuttle to travel instead of driving. And they experience a sense of neighborliness and "all the nice feelings of when most people did live in town," Mr. Lindley said.

After looking at homes in Fort Wood, North Chattanooga, and the Main Street area, the Lindleys purchased a Cowart Place townhome in 2002. The development is home to a wide variety of residents, including retirees, singles, young families, and couples.

"There's a strong sense of community in this neighborhood," Mr. Lindley said. "It's very

tight-knit. We find it easier to be neighborly."

J.Ed. and Tabitha Marston also enjoy the convenience of in-town living. They consider Highland Park an ideal location to raise their two children, four-year-old Zoe and Ezra, 19 months old. The family moved to Chattanooga in July 2003 from the Atlanta suburb of Acworth when Mr. Marston took a job as director of marketing and communications for the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce.

As Atlantans, Mr. Marston said he and his wife wanted to live in town, but housing costs were too high. However, they fulfilled that dream when they moved to Chattanooga.

"When we fell in love with Chattanooga, we realized this was an opportunity to get in on the cutting edge of something we were sure was going to happen," Mr. Marston said. "We wanted to be close to the city and active in making a difference. Living in town

seemed a great way to simultaneously make a good financial investment and a community investment."

The Marstons came to Chattanooga committed to an in-town neighborhood. They searched for nine months, considering homes in neighborhoods such as North Chattanooga, St. Elmo, and Highland Park. Today, the Marstons' 90-year-old renovated Victorian bungalow offers Mr. Marston an eight-minute commute to his Broad Street office and "a fantastic quality of life," he said.

The Marstons enjoy being close to parks, downtown restaurants and family entertainment venues such as the Creative Discovery Museum and the Tennessee Aquarium. Access to the downtown magnet schools is another plus for their two pre-schoolers.

Offering advice to other families considering an in-town neighborhood, Mr. Marston stressed the importance of a home inspection by a reliable firm. And Mr. Lindley has three words for others considering a relocation: "Do it soon." The popularity of in-town living is on the rise, he said, and investing in such properties is a good financial move.

Mr. Marston is convinced he has a lasting value. "In-town neighborhoods are easily the best investment in terms of real estate," said the Highland Park homeowner. "There's no such thing as a sure thing, but this is pretty close."

Inspectors a Vital Link in Strong, Secure Neighborhoods

To many Chattanoogaans, a neighborhood is not just a place to live. It's a way of life, according to Neighborhood Services Department inspectors.

"You will learn very quickly in this job that people are passionate about neighborhood issues," said Randy Ridge, NSD code enforcement inspector. "It's interesting to hear stories from people who have lived in a neighborhood for many years."

Code enforcement inspectors play a vital role in ensuring Chattanooga's neighborhoods remain places people care deeply about, said Doris Parham, code enforcement inspector.



Randy Ridge, left, and Doris Parham review their inspection territory in their offices at the Neighborhood Services Department.

"My job is important because it helps revitalize neighborhoods in the inner city," she explained. "This results in a better quality of life for everyone."

Mrs. Parham has worked with the NSD as a code enforcement inspector for five years. A native of Chattanooga, she earned a degree in history from Spelman College. She is certified as a housing rehabilitation associate inspector from the Southern Building Code Congress International. Before joining the NSD, Mrs. Parham worked as a litigation specialist/client representative for Allstate Insurance for 21 years.

Mr. Ridge joined the NSD in 2000 as a code enforcement inspector. He is a