



North End Connection

The Newsletter of the Creston
Neighborhood Association

Fall 2014

A busy summer in Creston

On Saturday June 21, volunteers from the neighborhood and CNA staff took to Plainfield Avenue to spruce up our Water Quality islands. They pulled weeds, added mulch and installed new plants. Not only did they help keep our islands in tip top shape, but they had fun doing it. For more, see Commissioner Ruth Kelly's story on page 4.

Photo by: Ruth Kelly



On Saturday, September 6, neighbors turned out in force for the expanded 10th annual Creston Days and Car Show. With beautiful weather, fast cars, good food, a bounce house for the kids, and a beer tent for the adults, this event was described as "The best ever!."

Photo by: Pete Tabberer

On Tuesday, August 5 CNA hosted Neighborhood Night Out at Briggs Park. In addition to all of the usual festivities, games, face painting, and tours of a police van and fire truck, this year's event also featured a monarch butterfly release celebrating Creston's newly designated monarch way station. For more about monarch butterflies see Emily Lopez's story page 2.

Photo by: CNA



Monarch Butterflies and me

By: Emily Lopez

The small, delicate, beautifully colored Monarch butterflies have always been a symbol in my life. When I was child they signified mid-late summer. I remember searching for them, always hoping to see a chrysalis on a milk weed plant. It was always special when a Monarch visited our backyard garden, and I felt sad when we found a dead Monarch stuck to the front of the car after a road trip to the beach or up North.

Little did I know it then that I would someday be like the Monarch, making the long journey from the Michigan to Michoacan, in Central Mexico.

I was born and raised in Grand Rapids and my husband is from Michoacan but we choose to raise our family here. When I first met my husband, I remember researching Michoacan, to know more about where he was from. I was fascinated by the fact that it's one of the few places in Mexico that Monarch butterflies go to spend the winter.

We moved to Mexico for two years and had our first son there. When our son was five months old my parents came for a visit and we took them to El Rosario Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary in Angangueo, Michoacan. High up

in the mountains, at the top of a steep hike, the butterflies congregated in fields, and literally dripped from the branches of fir trees. It was a magical experience - one of the wonders of the world.

It's not just butterflies who take this journey. There are some small towns in Michoacan where it seems like the only folks left are the elderly because all the younger generations have migrated to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Las Trojes, Michoacan is one such place. Visiting there during the town's annual saint festival you run into relatives of those in Grand Rapids left and right.

There is something so comforting though knowing that



Photo by: CNA

A neighborhood child shows off their monarch butterfly at the butterfly release event at Brigs park during Neighborhood Night Out on Tuesday, August 5.

Monarchs made the journey just like so many people have. They winter in Mexico but come back to Michigan every year without fail. From Michigan to Michoacan and back.

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My furnace adventure: part four

By: Sharon Zils

Editor's note: This is another installment of the continuing saga of Sharon's furnace failure last year. Part One explained how a broken furnace led Sharon to the Grand Rapids Housing Rehabilitation and Grant Program. Part Two detailed the application process. Part Three discussed working with the city and how the contractor was chosen. This final Chapter details the works that was done and ties up most of the loose ends.

Last spring during the early May record cold snap, my furnace quit working, so I had applied for a loan through the city's Housing Rehabilitation and Grant Program.

Dale, owner of Builders Unlimited was personable and engaging during the scheduled walk through of my house last summer. Last spring during the early May record cold snap, my

furnace quit working, so I had applied for a loan through the city's Housing Rehabilitation and Grant Program.

I had noticed immediately that he and city employee Lisa, the Housing Rehabilitation Specialist assigned to my case, knew each other well. After everyone had left, Dale was still chatting with Lisa in front of the house. As I approached them, Dale introduced himself, offered me his business card and we exchanged friendly small talk. I didn't know at this time that he was going to be the one. He was the contractor who would be doing the work in my house.

After Dale had been awarded the contract, he, Lisa and I had a meeting to go over the contract specifics, discuss the project timeline and signed the numerous forms. I learned slowly over time, I needed to trust that when he says he'll do something, he will. However, Dale doesn't over-

see every project himself. I like my contractor. I really do, but he can't be everywhere at once, doing it all by himself. So, his business is only as good as the people he hires to do the work. I'm not going to lie. There have been a few missteps along the way with my rehab job. However, trust and communication is the key ingredients to having a good working relationship with anyone, and most importantly, it goes both ways.

A good example of a resolved problem is the new vinyl garage door installed by a subcontractor, it didn't include a way for me to pull it down from the top of the track without me jumping for it, or climbing on a step stool.

One call to Dale got his son Scott over to my house. He took one look my antics while I demonstrated my jump shot. We both

See: Furnace pg. 7



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Meet Lindy, CNA's new intern

Hello! My name is Lindy Nawrocki and I am the new face at the CNA for the summer.

I joined the team this May as a communications intern. My projects will include the organization of ideas and feedback, from residents and affiliates, and upkeep of the Facebook page and the CNA Rapidian page.

I grew up in Ada and recently moved to the West Side of Grand Rapids. This fall I will be a senior at Aquinas College to complete minors in Community Leadership and Spanish, and a major in Communications.

For the past few years I have been a Salvation Army Action Group member and volunteer frequently with my parish, Saint Alphonsus.

This past school year I coordinated the Social Action Committee at Aquinas College. In this position I educated myself on many social justice issues and created awareness of various injustices on and off campus.

My passions lie in recognizing destructive patterns in our communities and finding positive modes of change.

Currently I work as the Administrative Assistant at Dwelling Place of downtown Grand Rapids. I am learning so much about housing in Grand Rapids, the lower income residents of the city, and the active efforts to revitalize the downtown neighborhood. I enjoy attending various events in Grand Rapids, biking, and reading. You can reach me at lindy-rocki@comcast.net with any comments or questions.

Island Spruce up

By: Ruth Kelly

On June 21 a dedicated group of Creston neighbors spent the day restoring the beautiful perennial gardens in the Plainfield Water Quality Islands. After an unusually harsh winter some of the plants simply didn't survive.

Money raised from Creston Business Association fundraisers and a contribution of city tools along with some funds left over from the initial street project provided the resources to add soil, replace missing plants and add protective mulch.

New to the neighborhood, Phil and Mark Bouman, new property owners at 117 Page St. N.E. and founders of the GR International Hostel, joined the effort and later commented "We had no idea what all went in to the maintenance of these water quality islands but now we grin every time we drive up Plainfield."

We're seeing the results in a beautiful display of color and greenery. Recall that the islands not only provide our business corridor with beauty, but capture and filter out contaminants in storm water, the number one source of pollution in the Grand River and Great Lakes.

Special thanks go out to the neighbors who've adopted an island and work to keep them free from litter, weeded and healthy and to the neighbors who gave up their Saturday to work. Laurie



Photo by Ruth Kelly

A neighbor helps weeds the perennials in one of Plainfield Avenues water quality islands on Saturday, June 21.

Williams from Car Star organized the event, Duane Culver, President of the Creston Business Association opened his office for coffee and donuts and team organizing and Larry Zeiser provided food and drink at the end of the day courtesy of Graydon's Crossing. Special thanks go out to city engineer Breese Stam for spending the entire day working with all of us. Let us know if you're interested in joining this group of urban gardeners!

The House I live In Review

By: Lindy Nawrocki

On June 29, at the Boardwalk Theater, CNA hosted a screening of the film "the House I Live In" followed and discussion of America's criminal justice system. Lindy Nawrocki wrote the following review, for those that could not attend the event.

In 2012 director Eugene Jarecki, won his second Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival for *The House I Live In*.

Jarecki's documentaries are often political and dramatic, exposing his discontent at areas of corruption and exploitation in our society. *The House I Live In* stays true to the honest, pro-active, and revealing story-telling style of Jarecki.

In *The House I Live In*, Jarecki

opens up about his own upbringing. He weaves his own experiences with those of his nanny's, whose son was addicted to drugs, and the lives of many others involved in the drug industry; all to make the point that the war on drugs affects everyone. Jarecki interviews his nanny whose life as an African American female was far different and difficult than Jarecki ever dared to guess. He also interviews and follows the stories of an activist, a handful of politicians and lawyers, a young father incarcerated because he was drug trafficking, a young woman selling drugs in order to survive, and many others. Jarecki truly delves into the many view points of view, pointing out that this war on drugs is deeper rooted than many ever realized.

Each side of the War on Drugs

is examined, from those who are for harsher punishment on those who commit drug-related crimes to those who view drugs as a necessary escape from harsh, deprived circumstances. Drug abuse is depicted as a major public and health problem in the United States, tearing apart families, turning good citizens into "criminals" ceaselessly, and creating deep emotional scars on those making the arrests to those being arrested, and everyone who cares about those involved.

The House I Live In exposes a dark, deep-rooted truth in American society that drug policy was initiated as a power to keep minorities on the outskirts of society. This has developed noticeable disproportions in how many African-American and Hispanic mem-

See: Review, pg. 8



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Local History

By: Julie Tabberer

A few years ago, I ran across the picture to the right, labeled as 1419 Coit Avenue NE. I was immediately curious: it looks like no other building along the Plainfield Avenue corridor. My first thought was that the building was no longer there, but as I compared it to the current building, I determined that yes, it is the same structure. Why was this imposing, neoclassical building built? Are those pillars still in there somewhere? Why was the building changed?

I finally took some time and dug into newspapers, photographs, city directories and archives at the Grand Rapids Public Library. I answered some of my questions, but not all of them, and uncovered things I wasn't expecting.

The building opened its doors on January 22, 1927 as the 15th branch of the Grand Rapids Savings Bank. When plans for the site were announced, bank president Gilbert L. Daane declared that it would be "one of the finest branch bank buildings in the city" (Michigan Investor, August 22, 1925). An advertisement in the January 21 Creston News invited people to the formal opening of Grand Rapids Savings Bank "beautiful new north end office." The ad ensured patrons that the bank was dependable, with \$26,000,000 in deposits.

Two short years later, the Great Depression began and the banking industry was in trouble. Thousands of banks across the country failed. In early 1933, two of the large banks in Detroit were facing severe financial difficulties. On February 14, 1933, Governor William A. Comstock declared a

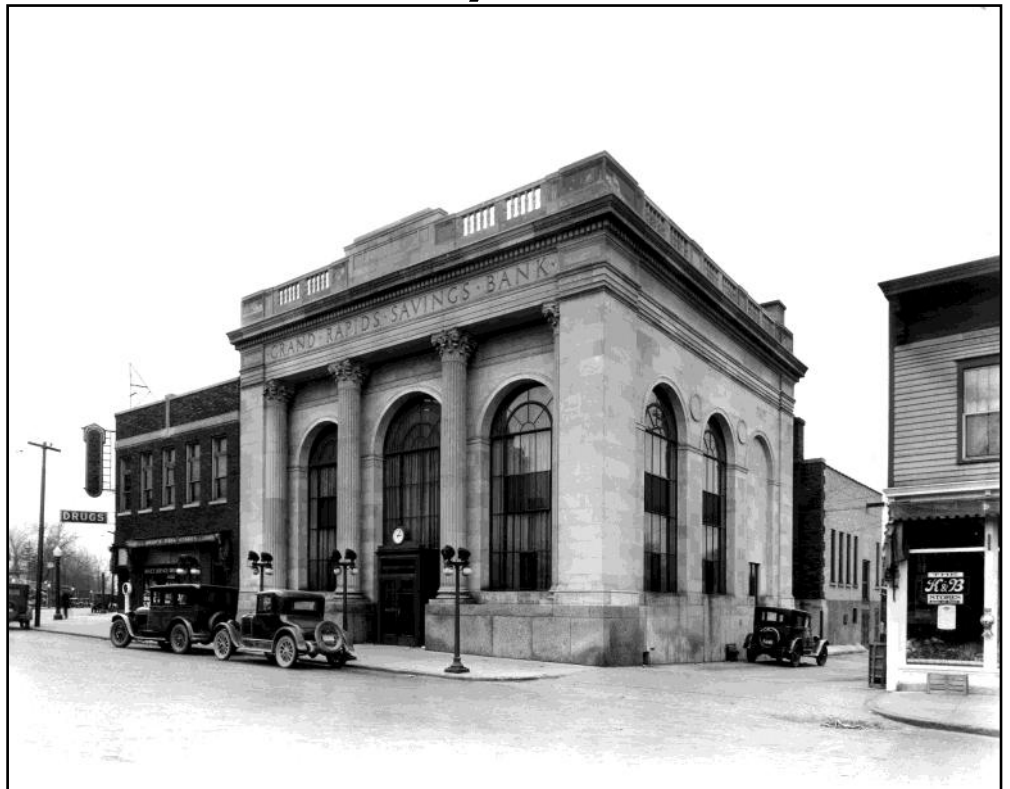


Photo Courtesy: Grand Rapids Public Library (Collection 54-7-23)



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Grand Rapids Savings Bank

statewide banking holiday, closing all banks for 10 days. This was followed by President Roosevelt declaring a national banking holiday on March 6. Several Grand Rapids banks struggled to come out of the bank holiday, and two of them failed, including the Grand Rapids Savings Bank. After being open only five years, the branch in Creston was also closed.

Since it's life as a bank branch, the building has seen a variety of uses. In the late 1930s, John Wawee opened a grocery store in the building, called John Wawee's Market. Wawee was a Lebanese immigrant who owned five grocery stores in Grand Rapids. His Creston store was open for about six years and was briefly followed by an A&P grocery store.

The Gantos family, also from

Lebanon, purchased the building in 1944 and a Gantos store was operated there in the 1950s and 1960s. Over the years, the building was used for offices, including several a dentist and several doctors. Other occupants included a printing company, an arcade called the Wizard's Palace and a church.

In 1987, Earl Culver purchased the building and moved his accounting firm into the space in 1988. Today, Culver

CPA Group, owned by Earl's son Duane, is still located at 1419 Coit. Duane is active in the neighborhood is the president of the Creston Business As-

sociation.

I visited Culver CPA and discovered that the pillars are no longer in existence. The change to the building's exterior was made sometime between 1933 and 1944, but I did not (yet) learn why, or where those pillars may have gone.



Photo Courtesy: Grand Rapids Public Library (Robinson Collection, H003856)

A 1944 photograph shows 1419 Coit as an A&P Supermarket. The elaborate neo-classical pillars had, at the time of this photo, already been removed.



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Ad in the Creston News, January 14, 1927.

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Review, cont. from pg. 7

bers of society have been incarcerated, versus other groups.

While the film only runs for a little less than two hours, it seemed longer since the implications are daunting and at some points discouraging. The takeaway is more hopeful as the war on drugs is affecting our communities and areas of living, so we truly can make a difference for our fellow neighbors if we work hard enough.

Nixon coined the term "war on drugs" during his presidency in 1971. If this really is a war, then we need to realize that we have the power to fight against the destruction that drugs are doing to our communities. Once we engage ourselves and then understand the grave, yet enlightening implications of this documentary then our personal understanding can open up further communication lines. This was a powerful, instructive social justice film to view and discuss with CNA neighbors.

Roads, cont. from pg. 1

laughed. And at Builders Unlimited's expense, he had purchased a handle. Installed it, then looped and knotted a length of rope through it. I was in business. No more jumps to reach the door to pull it down.

Another thing that had occurred was the finished wood floor got scratched when they moved my empty bookcase. Once again, Scott came to the rescue. I was impressed with the diligence that he gave to his work. I couldn't even find where the repair was until he pointed it out to me. All in all, the bottom line is customer service. An unresolved complaint can lead to many people being told by that one disgruntled customer how badly they were treated. This can snowball into no one calling your company for goods and service. Next thing you know, you're out of business.

There was another issue with the interior caulking around the new windows. It had separated from the sills and the vinyl. Unfortunately, I had had to make that dreaded phone call to report it to

Dale. He was apologetic and he hadn't hesitated to send in his son again to fix the problem. I also came home one day from work to find Scott re-installing the new front door locks. He said that his dad told him that they weren't "done right" so there he was doing right by me.

All in all, the response from Dale has been satisfactory. I remember from my last meeting with Lisa the day before Thanksgiving, 2013 that there was 18 months from the completion date to call Dale about any further problems associated with the project. So as you can tell by this narrative, I took full advantage of that option.

In addition, I'm going to be putting the painting of my living and dining rooms a priority. In fact, one of my friends has a power roller that he may let me borrow. That'll sure speed up that chore!! But only after I wash the walls with the Ajax original dish soap that Lisa recommended. According to her, that method won't disturb the 30 year old lead paint. Now, it's time to pull on those rubber gloves and get scrubbing!

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Riverside Elementary update

By: Deborah Eid

The former Riverside Elementary School at Comstock and Coit has been in the process of redevelopment for some time. An approved project lost its developer last year due to lack of funding. Since then, a new developer has been found. This summer neighbors weighed in on the proposed designs for Vista Springs, a new senior assisted living center.

At the hearing for final approval of the new investor's project in July we welcomed them to the neighborhood and thanked the owner, Lou Andriotti, for his plans to integrate this new senior assisted living center into the community through an "open door policy", offering use of their media center and small conference rooms and proposed playlot to neighbors – a great fit for a

neighborhood with lovely homes and a high level of interconnect- edness between neighbors.


This neighborhood has, for more than half a century, enjoyed the park- like environs of the Riverside Elementary campus. Every day of the week dogs were walked and people chatted while their kids played on the old playground. This green space has long been a gathering space for the neighborhood. During the open houses in June neighbors took pictures on the steps of the old school they had themselves attended years ago.

Neighborhood input made a difference in this project. When Mr. Andriotti and his Vista Springs staff showed their initial drawings to neighbors the response was mixed. Neighbors here place high value on the aesthetics of their properties. The biggest consistent concern of

neighbors was the addition of the peaked roof entryways to what is a highly regarded midcentury modern building. In response the architect made adjustments to the façade, adding stone and lowering the pitch of the roof. The developer also moved the playlot location to the east away from mature trees and the planning commission deferred the addition of 5 parking spots adjacent to a neighbor's property.

Final approval of the project for brownfield tax credits is pending with the City's economic development department but construction is underway with an opening anticipated for January 2015.

A special shout out to CNA members Betsy Hammerschmidt and Jim Rinck for their solid representation of neighborhood interests in the discussions with the City, the developer and the

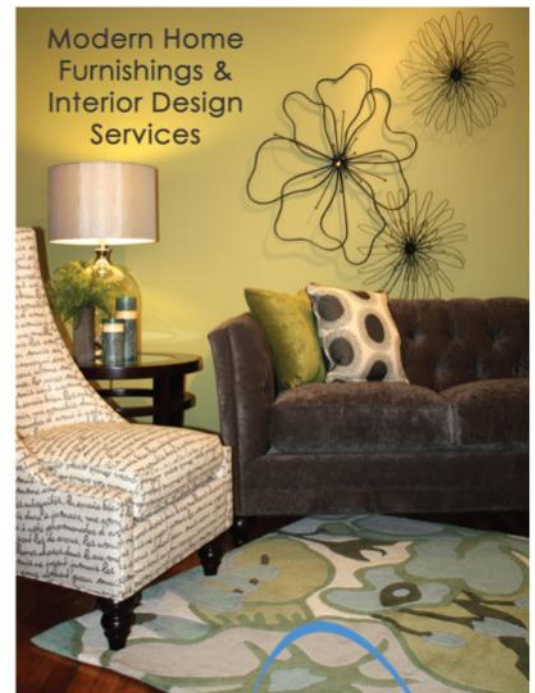


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North End Connection
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The North End Connection is a community newsletter published 4 times a year with a circulation of 1000 and is distributed in various local businesses. Advertising space is available. Contact our office for rate information.

The North End Connection is produced by volunteers and published by the Creston Neighborhood Association. The views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the staff, Board of Directors or membership of the association.

CNA is partially funded by the City of Grand Rapids Community Development Block Grant and Justice Assistance Grant Funded Programs.

Volunteer Opportunities at CNA

Volunteers are important to the Creston Neighborhood Association! If you would like to get involved, here are some areas where you can help.

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- ☐ **Volunteer and Membership Committee:** Encourages participation in CNA.
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- ☐ **Living Green in Creston:** Promotes the environmental health of the Creston neighborhood

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Dumpsters Days
Saturday September 20
8 am—noon @ Berrien Baptist Church

Volunteer and board meet and greet
Thursday September 25
5:30pm @ CNA Offices (205 Carrier)

Fall Water Quality Islands Spruce - Up
Saturday October 25 8 am– noon

Save the date for CNA's Annual Mem-
bership Meeting and Board Election!
Thursday October 23.



Fall 2014

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