

THE HILLTONE

HILTONIA ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Summer 2002

A View from the Hill, *Andrea Lehman, from interviews with Ellen Stern, Myrna and Levi Kushner, and Pat Garfing*

For this edition of the Hilltone, we get several views of Hiltonia from people who not only live in the neighborhood today but also grew up here. Not surprisingly, they paint a picture of an area that has both changed and stayed the same.

Some of what these long-time Hiltonians remember is hard to imagine. Myrna Kushner, who has lived on Buckingham Avenue since 1941, and her husband, Levi, remember when Cornwall Avenue was a "wilderness" with very few houses. Ellen Stern, a resident off and on (mostly on) since 1959, recalls walking to Junior 3 (now the Holland Middle School) by way of the Sanhican Luncheonette on Bruce Park Drive, where she'd load up on candy bars. Everyone walked to local shops, they recall, before shopping malls and declining neighborhoods pushed small businesses out.

Other memories include the elaborate Halloween spread that drew kids like a magnet to the Schraggers' foyer. Though Hiltonia has always been friendly, long-time residents remember when people knew more of their neighbors — perhaps because all the kids went to public school together, most moms stayed home, and many residents had relatives in the neighborhood. But by the late '60s, families were spreading out, the schools declined, and other parts of Trenton became less safe. Many of the doctors, lawyers, and other professionals and business owners who lived on "Cracker Hill" (so called because the houses were so expensive that, after buying one, you could only afford to eat

crackers) left the city for the suburbs or sent their children to private school.

But what those interviewed remember most vividly was the vibrancy of the park. In addition to the deer paddock menagerie, the park's zoolike feel was bolstered by Ellarslie's former incarnation as a monkey house and the presence of bears in subterranean cages. The playground was packed with kids, who also could enjoy a merry-go-round, pony rides, and a balloon vendor on Sundays. Older park-goers came to theater in the park in the mid- to late '60s.

You won't find many parks like that today, just as you'll find fewer mom-and-pop businesses, stay-at-home moms, impromptu ball games in the street, and milkmen who deliver to your kitchen. Still, Hiltonia maintains many of the same attributes it's had for half a century: lovely houses, friendliness balanced by a respect for privacy, and a convenient location. And some changes are for the better. As the need for greater community involvement and a way to get to know your neighbors grew, so did the Hiltonia Association, which was previously inactive. Long-time Hiltonian Pat Garfing feels that while the neighborhood has always been beautiful, it's even more beautiful today, thanks to people fixing up their homes and grounds. And all those interviewed agree that Hiltonia's diversity — with people of different races, nationalities, religions, sexual orientations, and ages living well together — nurtures and enriches all of our lives.

What's New in Town? *Raissa Walker*

Countering a widespread misperception that Hiltonia is set apart from the greater Trenton community, a few of your neighbors have begun to prove their dedication to this great city by participating in Leadership Trenton, a privately funded program developed by the Center for Leadership Development at Thomas Edison State College.

Leadership Trenton established its inaugural class in February 2002 with 35 participants. This highly competitive program seeks to increase civic leadership through a network of community fellows who care about the future of the Trenton region. Fellows participate in a yearlong series of structured seminars designed to provide information, increase understanding, and stimulate discussion of such critical public policy issues as education, economic development, race and cultural relations, health and human services, housing and public safety. The program is geared toward individuals who live or work in the City, demonstrate leadership potential and, most importantly, have a vision for Trenton's future.

Nelida Valentin serves as the Program Director for this initiative and Jim Golden is the Chairman of the Leadership Trenton Board of Directors. I am proud to be a member of

the 2002 charter class. As a member, I can attest to the effectiveness of this forum in which a diverse group explores ideas and strategies for invigorating Trenton.

Although Hiltonians don't witness many of Trenton's problems first hand, we cannot insulate ourselves from them. Not only is it foolish to believe that a certain address will protect us from the city's ills, it is incumbent on each of us to bring our skills and talents to the table to generate debate and spark new ideas. It is not enough to honor Trenton's glorious past; we must all work together to ensure an equally glorious future! All Trentonians should be encouraged that there is a dedicated cadre of civic-minded individuals being trained to lead Trenton into a vibrant future, but we can't expect that there will always be someone else to do this vital work. Broad participation is essential to the long-term success of this initiative. If you are interested in becoming a fellow, contact Nelida Valentin at (609) 777-0516 or apply on line at www.tesc.edu/aboutus/watson/leadership-trenton.

Take the chance and be counted. As the old adage goes, those who are not part of the solution are part of the problem.

